Kino no Tabi Volume8

source : https://www.baka-tsuki.org/project/index.php?title=Kino_no_Tabi:Volume8

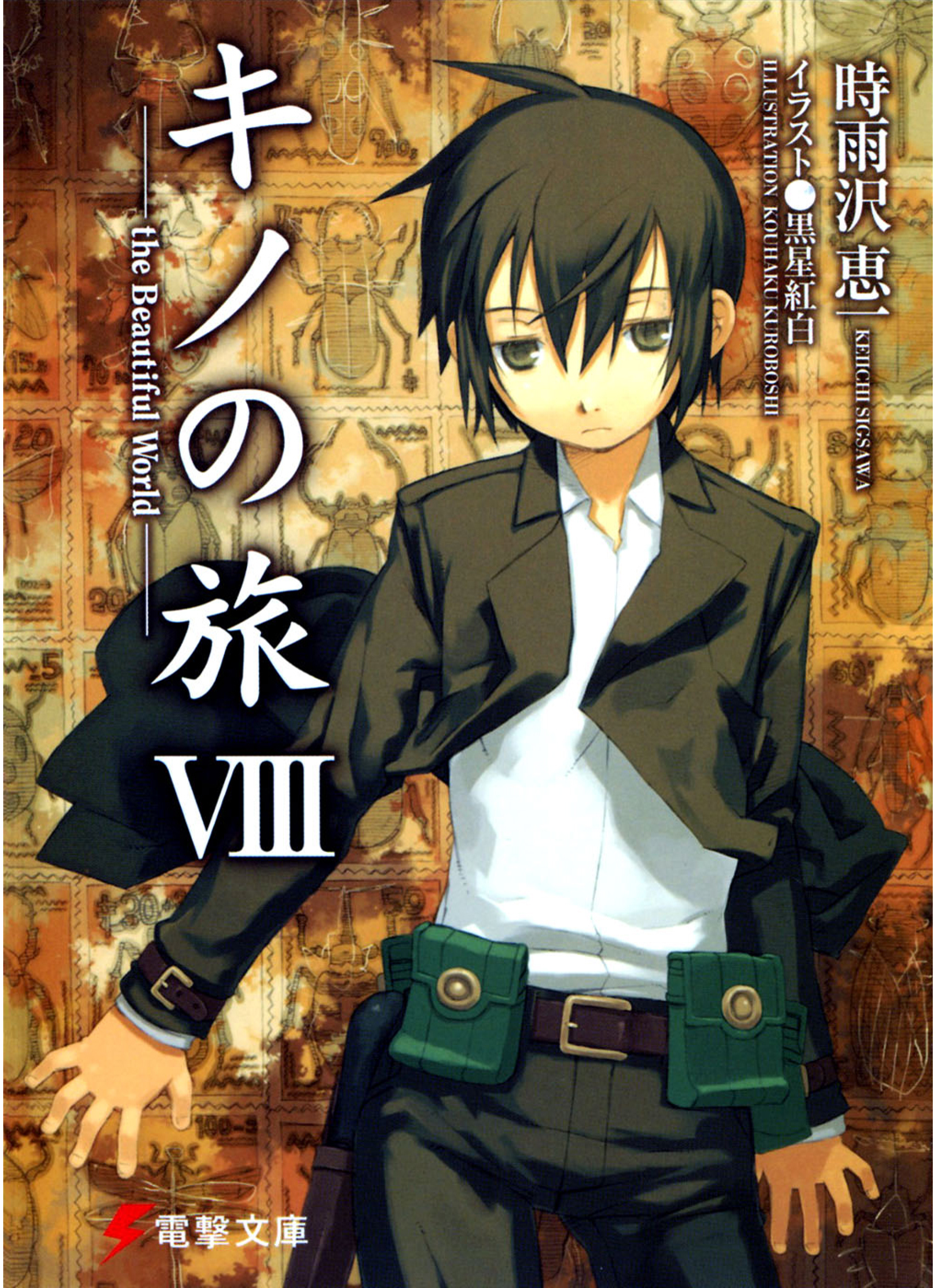
These are the novel illustrations that were included in volume 8

キノの旅（たび）Ⅷ

the Beautiful World

「あー…」運転手が口を開いた。力のない声だった。「何さ？　キノ」モトラドが聞いた。キノと呼ばれた運転手は、ポツリと「お腹すいたな」「だったら、止まって休む！　空腹で倒れられたら——」モトラドの訴えを「はいはい。何回も聞いたよ、エルメス」キノは流す。エルメスと呼ばれたモトラドは「分かっててやってるんだから」呆れ声で答えた。「そもそも、あの国が滅んでいたのがいけない」カーブを抜けながら、キノが言った。

——お腹をすかせたキノとエルメスが辿り着いた場所には、盆地の中央を埋め尽くすように、数百人の難民が集まっていた……（『愛のある話』）他、黒星紅白が描くイラストノベルも含め全８話収録。



キノの旅
Ⅷ

—the Beautiful World—

時雨沢恵一
KEIICHI SIGSAWA

イラスト●黒星紅白
ILLUSTRATION KOUHAKU KUROBOSHI

電撃文庫

し-8-12

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時雨沢恵一

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自分を強く見せようと力む筆者

時雨沢恵一（しぐさわけいいち）

1972年神奈川生まれ。実は宇宙人で地球侵略に来ているのだが、誰もそれに気づいていないばかりか、本人もすっかりその事を忘れている。誰か思い出させてやってください——お前はライトノベル作家をしている場合ではないのだと。連絡待っています。かしこ。

【電撃文庫作品】

キノの旅	the Beautiful World
キノの旅 II	the Beautiful World
キノの旅 III	the Beautiful World
キノの旅 IV	the Beautiful World
キノの旅 V	the Beautiful World
キノの旅 VI	the Beautiful World
キノの旅 VII	the Beautiful World
キノの旅 VIII	the Beautiful World
アリソン	
アリソン II	真昼の夜の夢
アリソン III〈上〉	ルトニを車窓から
アリソン III〈下〉	陰謀という名の列車

イラスト：黒星紅白（くろぼしこうはく）

1974年生まれ。性別：男。九州在住。プレイステーションソフト「サモンナイト」のキャラクターデザインを手がける。フリーでも色々やっています。趣味：プラモデル買い、釣り。

カバー／旭印刷

時雨沢恵一
KEIICHI SIGSAWA

イラスト●黒星紅白
ILLUSTRATION KOUHAKU KUROBOSHI

キノの旅

—the Beautiful World—

VIII

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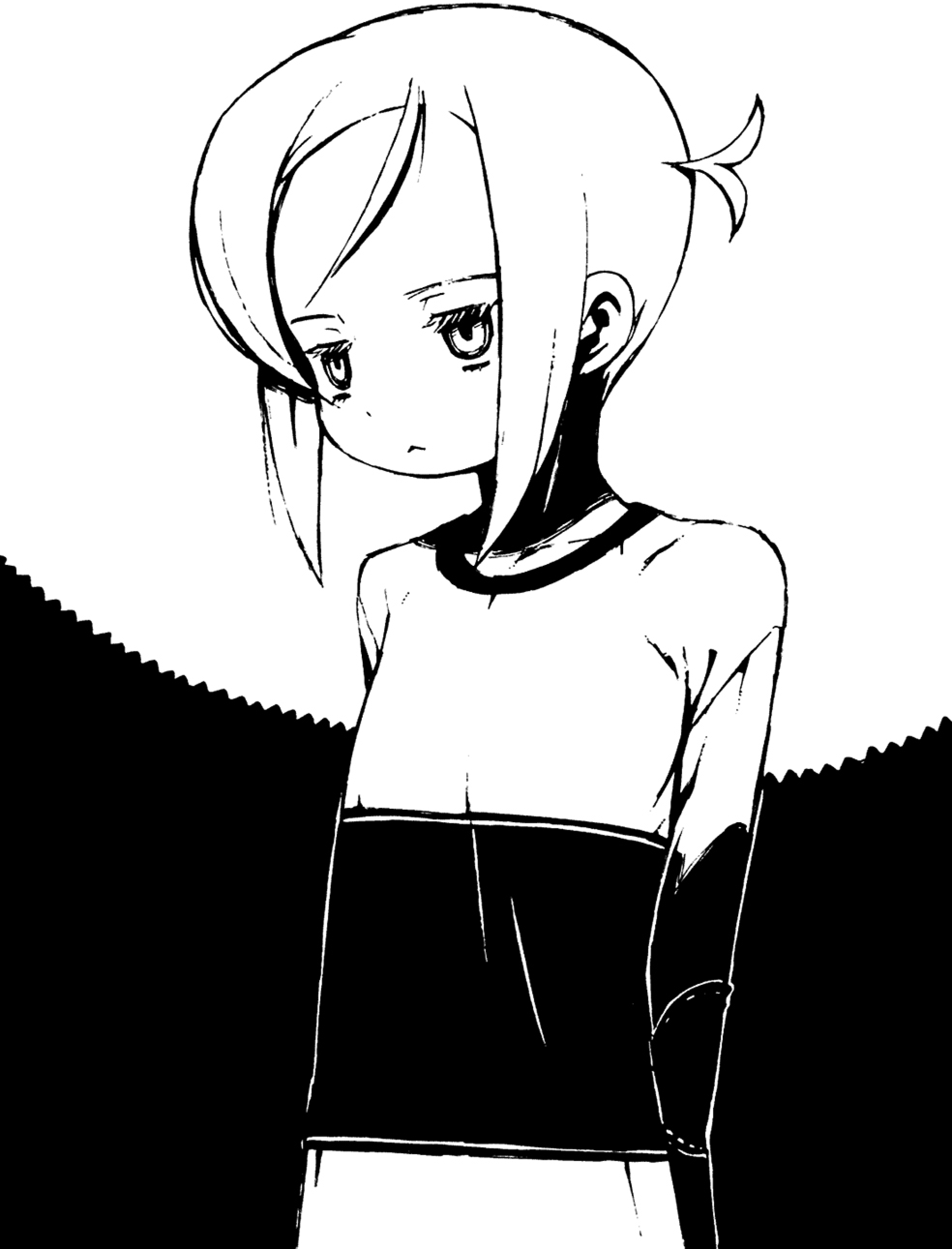
Thoughts
are not
perfectly conveyed

— I know what you're thinking. —

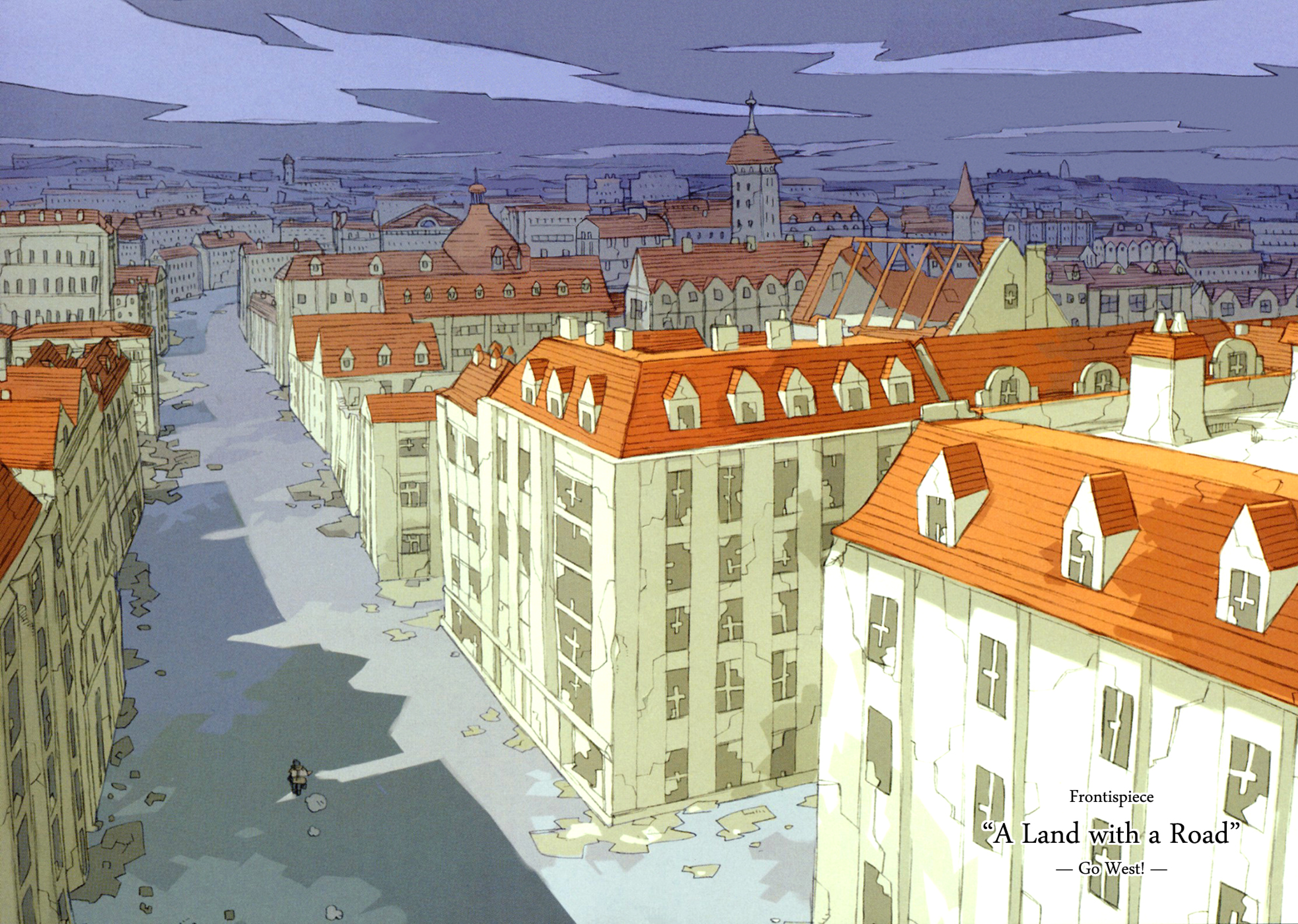
Epilogue

“The Ship Country”

— On the Beach · a —



“A Land with a Road” — Go West! —



Frontispiece

“A Land with a Road”

— Go West! —

"Isn't it such a great road, Kino?"

"Yeah…"

"I say road, but it's actually more of a highway. It's my first time running through a road with such a clean surface, solid pavement, consistent width, gentle curves, and nice sceneries on both sides."

"Me too…"

"Cheers to this country's citizens for making something like this!"

"Sure… But you can't drink, Hermes."

"It's just a matter of passion! Honestly, I really feel like praising them when I meet them in person."

"Yeah… That would be nice, if only it were possible… "

"Why?"

“Who knows? I have no idea at all…how it’s possible for every single person in a country to die. Because there’ s nobody here, there’s no one we could ask…”

“Well, yeah. —Even so…”

“Even so?”

“I can’t see the end of this road. At this rate, we’re just going to slam into something. They should have at least made it so that the western wall could be seen.”

“Indeed… We’ve been running nonstop since the day before yesterday…”

“If you don’t arrive at the gates by the end of the day, you’ll be violating your three-day rule.”

“That’s why I’m doing my best here…”

“Isn’t it such a great road, Kino?”

“Yeah…”

“The Land Where No Crime Can Be Done”[1] — Black box —

Frontispiece

“The Land Where No Crime Can Be Done”

— Black box —

Kino and Hermes had eyeglasses on.

Kino, of course, was wearing it on her face. Meanwhile , Hermes…

“Kino, isn’t this weird?”

“You look great, I swear.”

“Really? But it’s so annoying.”

…was wearing it in front of his headlights.

And then the bespectacled human and vehicle was greeted by a view of the country’s interior as the inner gates opened before them.

—

A little while ago.

“Now, let me explain,” the country’s immigration inspector offered.

The luggage-laden Hermes, together with Kino who was clad in her brown coat, as well as the business-attired inspector were in a small room built within the walls.

“Miss Kino, the object you’re holding right now is a gadget in the form of eyeglasses that serves as a monitoring device.”

There was a pair of eyeglasses in Kino’s hands, just as the inspector pointed out. At first glance, it looked very much like normal glasses. However, attached on its sides where it would touch the temples were tiny contraptions the size of the tip of a pinky.

“The left one with the lens is a camera, while the one at the right is a sound recording device and power supply. That camera will record whatever Miss Kino sees, even at night. The same goes for the sound recorder. This means that all of your actions will be monitored. But that’s an obvious invasion of privacy, so the ones who can do the monitoring are—”

“Only the police or the court?”

“That’s right, Mr. Hermes. A person can’t even look at his own records. When a police warrant is issued, only then can the suspect’s records be viewed. Therefore, all criminal acts are exposed, no exceptions.”

“I see. So that’s why this place is called the ‘country where no crime can be done’.”

The inspector nodded enthusiastically in response to Kino’s words. Of course, he was wearing the aforementioned glasses.

“That’s right. It is clear to see that in this country, ‘all wrongdoings are exposed’. Everyone knows that this effort is all worth it. Before, crimes were frequent and murder was the top cause of death. Superficial action wasn’t able to remedy the situation, so we pooled together our wisdom and created this system. For the past several decades, public order has dramatically improved. Now, there are no other crimes except for those done on impulse, and even these are exposed immediately.”

“I see.”

“Uh-huh.”

“To protect this system, we created a law that prohibits removing these glasses whenever your body is in movement, with a few exceptions. When the user’s brain waves are not in a resting state, and the glasses detected that it was removed from the skin for more than thirty seconds, a warning is issued and the people nearby will be alerted with their glasses. The few exceptions are when you are sleeping, dressing up, putting on make-up, taking a shower, and so on. All over the country, there are eyeglass charging stations that serve as support by allowing the user to get projected. The camera can also recognize if the user is doing one of the exceptions through the body’s form.”

“This is some amazing technology.”

“True, true. So amazing.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear that.”

After an embarrassed laugh, the examiner finally got to the point. He informed Kino and Hermes that the condition for entering the country was for Kino to wear the glasses during their three-day stay, just like ordinary citizens.

“That’s fine with me. I will do it,” Kino said with a nod . And then she asked the inspector, “By the way, what about Hermes? I think it’s a good idea to let Hermes wear one too.”

“Well, a motorrad cannot move by itself, so the law doesn’t really require it…”

“But in case of a traffic accident, it might be helpful if one is attached to Hermes…”

“Oh! That makes sense. Miss Kino understands the system very well! Okay then, I will have one made for Mr. Hermes right away!”

—

The bespectacled Kino and Hermes stayed in the country for three days. They rested and looked around, sold things they ought to sell, and bought things they needed.

It was a country with very good public order. No problems occurred and they caused no problems either.

“We did not break the speed limit, not even once.”

And soon it was time for them to depart.

“What are we going to do with these glasses?” Kino asked the inspector before the western gates.

“Once you’ve passed through the gates and stepped out of the country, you are no longer obliged to wear the glasses. Kindly hand them over to the guard at the outer gates. Of course, since you have not done anything illegal , all your records will be erased. You don’t have to worry about any invasion of privacy.”

After the inspector’s explanation, the glasses-wearing Kino glanced at the glasses-wearing Hermes. After some thought, Kino said, “If it’s possible, will you let us keep these? When we arrive in the next country, we would like to introduce to them this country’s wonderful invention. If we only talk about it, they might not believe that such advanced technology exists.”

“Oh.” The inspector was a bit surprised. “If it’s for something like that, then you can have it! By all means, use it to introduce them to our country’s ways. However, the battery will only last for two more days. Too bad, but it will lost its features.”

And so Kino and Hermes bid farewell to the inspector and guard, and proceeded on the road amidst the lush meadows towards the west.

—

“I just made a killing. A huge one.”

Kino muttered suspiciously as she rode through the meadows, her back to the walls that were getting smaller and smaller as they get farther away. Instead of the usual goggles, she was wearing the aforementioned glasses. And also, above Hermes’ headlights…

“Ah, enough already. Take *these* off.”

…the glasses were still attached.

“Just wait a bit more, Hermes. Only until the walls have completely disappeared from view.”

“Sheesh.”

And when Kino was sure that the top of the walls has vanished beneath the horizon, she cut Hermes’ engine.

Kino took out a metal lunchbox-like case from the box at the side of the rear wheel. Though it was rare of Kino to carry unnecessary things, the box was empty.

“Ah, so annoying,” Hermes grumbled.

And at last Kino removed the glasses from Hermes’ headlights as well as from her own face. Then she took out a small pin and tinkered with the hole of the recording device. She poked it several times, and repeated the same action after a few seconds. Eventually, the glasses let out a beeping sound. She did the same thing to the other one.

“—Done. With this it will stop functioning and our records will be erased,” Kino said happily as she carefully wrapped the two glasses in a cloth. And just as carefully, she stowed them away in the metal box and put it back in the rear wheel box.

“In the next country, we can sell this for a high price and earn a big profit. What’s more, we were lucky enough to be able to get two of it,” Kino explained merrily.

There was no longer a device to record her remark.

“You’re unbelievably wicked, Kino,” Hermes said.

Kino did not seem to hear or care about Hermes’ comment. At that moment, Kino was floating in her dreams of eating delicious food and buying new underwear.

“And we’re also going to get new oil and tires for you, Hermes.”

“I approve! —It was such a great country, wasn’t it?”

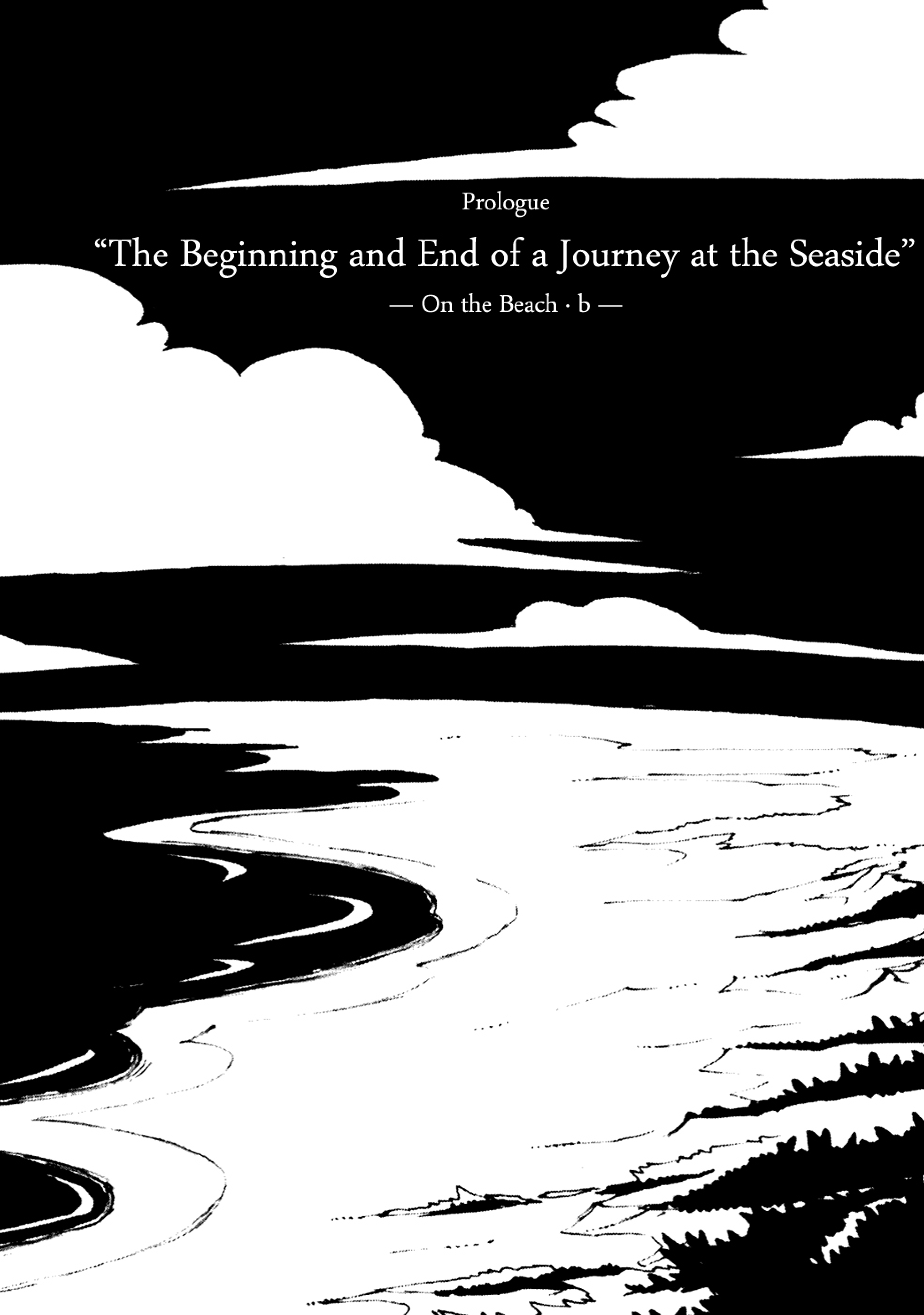
Kino nodded and started Hermes’ engine.

“The Beginning and End of a Journey at the Seaside” — On the Beach · b —

Prologue

“The Beginning and End of a Journey at the Seaside”

— On the Beach · b —



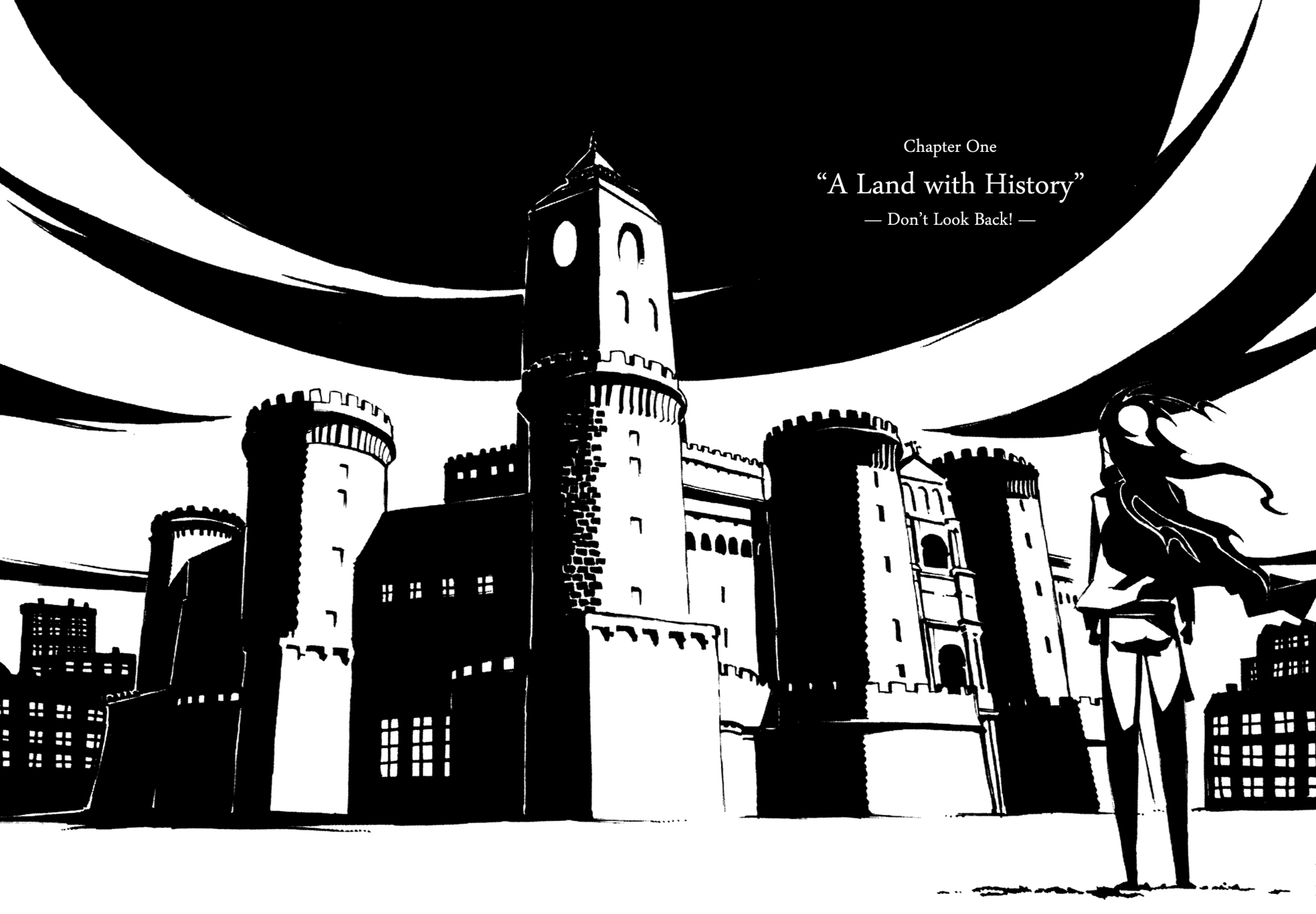
Translated by Untuned-Strings [here]

“A Land with History”[2] — Don’t Look Back! —

Chapter One

"A Land with History"

— Don't Look Back! —



A car was running on a forest road.

It was a small, yellow, car in a condition so bad that it looked as if it’s going to self-destruct at any moment. It rumbled and proceeded shakily on the road as white smoke sputtered from its exhaust pipe.

It was a vast land overrun with dense forests over flat terrain. The sun shone radiantly above the eastern horizon. A variety of birds were singing; it was a cool morning in early summer.

Two people were riding in the car. On the right-hand driver’s seat was a rather short but handsome young man with his hands on the wheel, while a young woman with long, black hair was seated in the passenger seat at the left side. Meanwhile, the narrow back seat was packed with dirty luggage and bags.

“Master,” the man spoke while driving. As the road was not in its best condition, he adjusted the steering wheel from time to time.

“What is it?” answered the woman called Master.

“We’ll soon be arriving in the next country, so—”

The man proposed that they sell the gem that they have in the next country and exchange it for food, fuel, and gold dust. The woman contemplated for a while.

“I guess we have no choice, but—”

“We should sell it at the highest possible price. I know. ”

Just ahead the car, the top of the walls came into view.

—

It was not too big of a country, but it seemed rich.

The first thing they beheld upon entry was the vast expanse of fields. After running for a while, they reached the country’s center that was lined up with stone apartments. The wide, streetlight-lined roads were dense with shops on both sides. It was a rather splendid townscape.

“This country looks great, doesn’t it? Its population is comparatively small, and its technology is pretty advanced. This is the sort of place where we could sell at a high price,” said the man in the driver’s seat of the tiny car.

This car was the dirtiest among the numerous vehicles running on the street. They were laughed at as a luxury car overtook them.

“What you said about the selling part is true; however …there are too many policemen in this city.”

The man agreed to the woman’s observation. There were lots of people walking around the city in the morning, but there were as many policemen, who looked like soldiers with their green uniforms.

“The immigration procedures took awfully long. That guard must also be an MP,” the man said. In this case, ‘ military police’ refers to a system that combines the army and the police.

“Based on my experience, you cannot let your guard down in countries like this.”

The man cast a sideways glance to the woman, and then asked, “Because of the bad public order?”

“No. —It’s the authorities we should be wary of. Let’s lay low in this country.”

“… Roger.”

The car stopped in front of a cheap-looking hotel.

—

“Well then, I’m going to cash out.”

The man said from the cramped room of the hotel. He wore a square-barreled hand persuader (Note: A persuader is a gun. In this case, a pistol) on his left hip, but it was hidden by the thin, brown jacket that he wore. He put the tiny bag that contained the gem inside his breast pocket.

“Please come back as soon as possible. There’s no need for us to stay long here. Let’s depart by evening.”

“I understand. I’ll be back by noon. Meanwhile, you go and have a relaxing shower, Master,” the man said as he left.

But noon has come and gone, yet the man did not return.

—

This is what happened to the man.

He showed the gem to a jeweler in the crowded shopping district. The shopkeeper’s momentary surprise was replaced with a broad smile. Then he disappeared to the back of the shop and came back, proposing a price that surprised the man. The man readily agreed, imagining the woman’s pleased face, and left the store with a grin. However,

“You there, wait.”

The moment he came out to the streets, he was surrounded by four policemen.

“You are suspected of possession of illegal drugs,” one of the cops said.

“Huh?”

Another policeman acted as if he was taking out his hand from the man’s pocket. And then he exposed a small bag that he was holding.

“Look we’ve caught you red-handed. We are arresting you for possession of illegal drugs.”

For a moment, the man considered pulling out his persuader and shooting to death all of the policemen—it wouldn’t take him two seconds—but,

“…”

He stopped after giving it a second thought.

The man was handcuffed and his persuader and personal belongings were confiscated. As he was about to ride the police car, he saw the shopkeeper of the jewelry store pass money to the police. The man let out a small curse and pondered how, even at this state, he could beat down all of the police, steal the car, and lunge it into the jewelry store while he’s at it. But,

“…”

He stopped after giving it a second thought.

“In short, your lover was arrested. In this country, illegal possession of drugs is a serious crime. It will be decided by the court from here on, but ten years in jail should be a fair estimate.”

“I see. But I’d like to correct one thing. He is not my ‘ lover’, he’s just a travel companion,” said the woman, who was in a room inside a large building at the country’ s center—an enormous and grandiose building octagonal in shape, built along with the spacious lawn that surrounded it.

A splendid clock tower stood at the center of the building, with a huge clock attached on each of the four sides facing east, west, south and north. The observation platform in its rooftop is higher than any building in the country, offering a 360-degree view of its surroundings.

It was in this room where the woman was seated in front of a desk, opposite a middle-aged police officer dressed in a uniform with important-looking decorations and embroidery while reclining comfortably in his seat. Several policemen stood around him. The outdoor scenery was visible from the gaps of the blinds, presenting a rather beautiful view of the sun setting to the west.

“Where is he right now?” the woman asked, and the middle-aged police officer answered that he was in an underground detention facility.

The woman took the opportunity to ask about the building. She was told that it was a historic structure that once served as a royal palace. But as the land was no longer ruled by a king, it was now used by various government offices. The clock tower was apparently a protected cultural site.

“It is the police who have the administrative rights to this building. In fact, this place is the police headquarters . I don’t think other countries have headquarters as luxurious as this,” the middle-aged policeman said proudly, and laughed.

“I see. That means it is the corrupt police who holds absolute political power, and use their authority to do as they please. Just as I thought.”

The woman did not say these words, which accurately point out the situation. Instead, “I understand the circumstances, but as you can see, we are travelers. With your excellency’s influence, it’s not at all impossible to arrange for his deportation, is it not?”

“Hmm. How much are you willing to pay?”

“About this much,” was the woman’s reply to the middle-aged police officer’s frank question, indicating a figure she wrote on a piece of paper. No one knew whether the amount was really all that she could give.

The middle-aged police officer leaned forward and peeked at the piece of paper.

“That won’t do. It’s not even worth discussing.” He leaned back to his chair once more with a shake of the head, and continued, “You’d better leave the country immediately. I’ll keep quiet about the offer you made here with us.”

The woman replied with her imperturbable expression and tone, “I’ll do just that. To begin with, he’s just some person I got acquainted to during my travels. I really don’t know anything about him, and it can’t be helped if he was caught doing something bad. I’ll leave him behind.”

“That’s a wise decision.”

“Just one last thing. Can I bid him farewell?”

“We can’t allow that since he has committed a serious crime.”

“About this matter, I would be very grateful for any assistance you can lend me,” she said while slowly taking out a single gold coin from her bosom. She placed it on top of the desk, covering the piece of paper she wrote on earlier. Seeing this, the police officer’s face relaxed.

“Hmm… But since you are a traveler, I’ll make an exception and allow you to talk with the criminal for a short time.”

—

The middle-aged police officer and the woman, together with an entourage of policemen, went out of the room and made their way down a corridor.

“…”

Along the way, the woman looked left and right with only her eyes, checking the tags stuck in front of the rooms. The policemen around her took no notice at all.

Eventually, the party went down to the basement using an elevator, and passed through the gates of the entrance to the detention facility, which was protected by policemen.

They proceeded on a hall lined with jails on both sides. Drab rooms with only beds, toilets, and water closets continued on.

And, in one of the rooms, there was a person—a handsome, but slightly short man—sitting on the bed. He raised his face as he heard the sound of footsteps. When he recognized the face of the woman surrounded by the police,

“Ah, Sis! You came here to have me released, right?” He said happily, gripping the cage. But the woman replied mercilessly,

“You were found guilty of doing such a terrible thing, you know.”

“Eh…”

“I even told you stay clear of unlawful activities.”

“No way… I was framed!”

“I hate causing trouble for other people. You know that, right? —Please face your trial here. There are countries I have to visit, so I can’t wait for you.”

“No way…” The man still gripped the cage and looked down helplessly. “Even if…I have lived my life so far without doing a single bad thing…”

“Then reflect on your crime here,” said the woman. The policemen around her looked at each other and laughed.

The man spoke feebly. “Sis, there’s something in my bag that I haven’t shown you yet. Sell it in the next country to add to your traveling expenses. I have no use for it anymore. But please sell it for a high price because it’s worth 434 silver coins when I bought it. You can also have the things I took with me this morning. Do as you like with them.”

“I understand. I’ll do that,” the woman answered, and the man went back to his bed, still crestfallen. And then he collapsed face-down on the bed, curling up his body.

“Surely that’s enough.”

“Yes.”

As commanded by the middle-aged police officer, the woman walked to the exit from the man’s jail.

She came back to the entrance of the detention facility and asked the police clerk about the man’s belongings. He took out the man’s persuader, holster, belt, knapsack, and a tiny bag.

“What about the gem and cash he had?”

“Oh, those are possible funds coming from illegal drug trade, and were all confiscated as evidence,” explained the middle-aged officer.

“I see,” was the woman’s only reply, and put the man’s belongings in the knapsack.

“Now, everyone, I’ll be taking my leave.”

And she left the building.

Upon returning to the hotel room, the woman relaxed for a bit, and then firmly closed the blinds.

Then, she opened the man’s luggage, a big backpack. At its bottom, there was a very sturdy plastic case that was about as big and thick as an encyclopedia. It looked like it can be used for beating people to death.

On one side of the case was a numeric keypad.

“…”

The woman keyed in 4-3-4 and the case opened smoothly. The inside was lined with a thick cushion cut out in several places, with a variety of contraptions neatly fitted in each.

“… Good grief. I wonder what that man did in the past . Well, let’s put these to use.”

The woman closed the case with a click.

“First is shopping. And then let’s get out of this country,” she muttered to herself.

The setting sun dyed the observation platform in the police headquarters in a yellow color.

The sound of a bell echoed from the lofty clock tower.

A police messenger came to the middle-aged police officer who was reclining on his chair.

“The woman earlier just left the country in a car. She only bought portable rations and traveling equipment. There was nothing suspicious with her actions.”

“I see… I thought she was dangerous, but she was just a fool after all. Don’t let her re-enter the country. Things might get troublesome.”

“Yes sir. By the way, there’s a message from the director who was attending a dinner party with politicians: ‘Good job. We’ll send your share later.’”

“Hmm. You also did very well.”

“Thank you very much. —What are we going to do about that man?”

“He could have been deported just fine, but punishing him with twenty years of hard labor is not a bad idea. We can decide later on.”

* * *

Night. It was quiet in the forest.

The stars twinkled in the clear, moonless sky.

The woman’s shabby, yellow car was parked in a forest a bit ways off the country.

The woman was sitting beside it, making rummaging sounds as she worked on something.

“Now then,” she said as she stood up. The scruff of her jacket was tightly closed, and she wore gloves and a knit cap. She was garbed in a single color—black. The holster of her favorite high-caliber revolver hung from her right hip, and she carried a knapsack on her back. Lastly, “I see…what an interesting device.”

Over her left eye, there was a strange cylinder that looked like a short and stout scope. A band wrapped around her head held it in place.

The woman gazed at the forest scenery through her left eye. The branches of trees swaying from the wind, as well as the moving animals, were amplified by the device . It created a world covered in a suspicious shade of green.

“‘Night-vision equipment’, is it? Fascinating,” the woman murmured to herself.

This set of night-vision equipment was one of the items stowed inside the man’s precious case. Other than this, there was the man’s persuader silencer that was especially made for assassination, for-assassin-use plastic knives that can pass through metal-detectors, for-assassin-use wires that can be used to strangle someone from behind, for-assassin-use capsules containing poison that can pass off death as a heart attack, for-assassin-use stabbing pen with a poison-laced tip, and so on. It was an arsenal for various assassination tools.

The woman traversed the forest without making any sound. Later that night, she arrived at the walls of the country she just left. Its tall, black walls soared towards the sky.

After confirming that there were no guards nearby, the woman pulled out the revolver from her waist. She disassembled the front half of the revolver and removed the barrel. She took out a different barrel from her knapsack.

It was a strange device. A thick, metal jar was inserted at the tip of the barrel, and was securely fixed with a wire . The bottom of the bottle has been hollowed out.

The woman attached this to the revolver’s body, and snapped open the hammer with her thumb. She pulled down the loading rod under the barrel, gripped firmly with her left hand, and aimed the bottom of the jar towards the top of the walls.

The woman fixed her aim, and pulled the trigger.

Thump.

There was a muffled shot, followed by a forceful quiver from the revolver’s recoil. An iron claw, a three-hooked metal not unlike a ship’s anchor, came out of the jar. The thin wire tied to the claw, which has been coiled inside the bottle, unwound as it came out.

The faint sound of the claws hitting and catching the top of the walls was heard. The woman returned the revolver to its original form and put it back in its holster.

She put on thick leather gloves and pulled the wire at different angles to make sure that it was stuck firmly.

“Here we go.”

The woman began climbing the wall.

—

While the woman climbed the dark walls without making a sound,

Yawn

Inside the dimly lit detention cell, the man turned face-up and began to yawn and stretch.

“It’ll probably take a bit more time. Maybe I should sleep.”

He rolled over, and slept.

—

Even though it was almost midnight, the shops in the country’s entertainment district were still crowded. Drunken customers happily come and go.

In one corner of the street, a policeman stood guard by himself with his back on the dark alley. The young man gazed at the street with a bored expression, tapping his palm with the baton in his other hand.

Two dark arms stretched from the darkness of the back alley. One arm closed in on the guard’s mouth, and the other one wrapped around his neck. The arms returned to the darkness without a sound.

No one noticed that one policeman disappeared from the street.

—

It was well past midnight.

The lively entertainment district has subsided, and only a few drunks were lying about on the quiet street,

Pop!

It was like the sound of escaping air, but much louder. The noise swiftly resonated.

“Heh?”

A nearby drunk opened his half-closed eyes. What was reflected in his eyes was a cloud of smoke rising from a trash can that has started to burn.

“A-ah…”

He stood up as he muttered, and recklessly held out his hands towards its warmth. At that moment,

Pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-popop!

Successive explosions were heard in every corner of the street.

“Huh?”

The man’s wide-open eyes reflected the bright light of the burning trash cans.

—

Police cars and fire trucks rushed in with bellowing sirens.

When he heard these sounds, the man in the detention facility opened his eyes. He sat on top of the bed, stretched, and let out a big yawn.

Amidst the nonstop blaring of the sirens, he could make out the distant clatter of running footsteps from the building’s upper floors.

With such noise as his backdrop, the man used the toilet, washed his hands and face, and began to exercise.

“Zero-one-two, three-four. Five-six, seven-eight.”

He moved his body gently, relaxing his muscles, and ended his exercise with a deep breath.

“Here goes…”

The man gripped the cage, and shouted in a voice loud enough to be heard through all the clamor.

“Hey, guard! What’s with the commotion? It’s so annoying I couldn’t sleep!”

“Quiet! It’s none of your business so shut your trap!” the guard yelled back from the entrance of the detention facility.

“Eh, but this commotion is not normal is it? Something big must be happening, right?”

“Shut up! There was no contact from above, and I was about to go and ask!”

“Is that so? You’re such a hard worker. If you find out, kindly tell me—”

“Shut up! —Ugh!”

“Huh? What’s the matter —?”

No answer came from the guard, who only let out an unpleasant scream.

Instead, another policeman came walking down the corridor and stopped in front of the man’s jail.

“I knew you’d come for me, Master. —I’m sorry for letting down my guard.”

“Good grief, you’re really an apprentice I had to look after.”

The one wearing the police uniform was the woman called Master. She wore the uniform tightly over her other clothes, and hid her long hair underneath the uniform cap. At first glance, she looked like a refined young man.

The woman quickly opened the man’s jail with a key, and tossed him the knapsack she was carrying.

“Inside is your persuader, as well as a set of uniform. Change your clothes.”

The man took the sack and started to change. Meanwhile, he asked, “Where my ‘toys’ helpful?”

“Well, in a way. —We’ll leave this place once you’re finished changing.”

“What are we going to do?”

The man stuffed the clothes he has taken off into the knapsack once he has finished changing into the police uniform.

“We’ll walk into the building from here.”

“Eh? Shouldn’t we escape right away?”

“Right now it would be impossible to get out the country. The gates will definitely be closed, and the security will be tight. It’s unreasonable to break through the gates with just the two of us. Eventually, people will come here as well.”

“That’s true, but…what should we do?” the man asked .

“What would *you* do?” The woman returned the question. The man’s eyes registered an unusually serious expression.

“Let’s see… I’ll hide at once in a place where I can’t be found, for instance, in the attics or in the sewers. The search party will be tired by the third day or so, and by that time, I’ll immediately leave the country secretly, or by force, if necessary.”

“That makes sense, but not quite correct.”

“Oh?” The man had a rather disappointed look on his face.

The woman revealed the answer with an amused smile, “Waiting it out for three days before leaving is correct. However, hiding is not.”

“Then what is?”

“We’ll go on a rampage. First let’s go to the third floor, where there’s food and weapons. You’ve had plenty of rest while in jail, right? If you don’t want to get rusty, you should do some serious fighting once in a while. Also, the scenery from a high place is quite breath-taking.”

“… Ah!”

A gleeful expression crept on the man’s face as he gradually comprehended, then he laughed fiercely.

* * *

“Then, what happened to the two after that, Kino?”

A motorrad (Note: A two-wheeled vehicle. Only to note that it cannot fly) asked.

The motorrad was loaded with plenty of luggage on both sides and on top of its rear wheel. It was running leisurely on a road inside a forest, with the autumn foliage fluttering around it.

“Yup. After that—” The motorrad’s driver called Kino answered. She was wearing a brown coat, the excess hem of which was rolled up to her thighs. Goggles were strapped on her face, and she had on a brimmed hat with flaps covering her ears. She was considerably young, around her mid-teens.

The autumn sky was clear and not a single cloud can be seen. The bright sun announced the time of the day.

Kino answered the question while letting the motorrad run slowly. “Aside from the streets, Master also planted explosives and incendiary bombs in police cars and power stations. As a result, the headquarters was in chaos, and they could walk to the arsenal in their disguise without being discovered. Most of the police force was dispatched due to all the commotion Master caused. When they went into the arsenal and ransacked it for persuaders, not a single one found them suspicious, as they were dressed in police uniforms, and they stunned a few who stopped by the arsenal. Then they filled up a trolley with sniping rifles, small rapid-fire persuaders, ammos, and all sorts of explosives.”

“Whoa, scary. —It’s just like ‘dancing the mambo’, huh?”

“That’s right, Hermes,” Kino agreed so easily that the motorrad called Hermes fell silent for a while. Then he pulled himself together, “—Um, please continue Master’s story.”

“Ok. After they took all the weapons they could carry, the two headed next to the food storage, and loaded another trolley with portable rations and drinking water. Because what they were doing then was so suspicious, they had to knock three policemen in a nearby room unconscious.”

“And then, and then?”

“And then, they let out a rumor that bombs were planted inside the building. They activated the alarm and threw flares here and there. Everyone in the building scurried out. After that, they boarded the elevator to the top floor, carrying the two trolleys with them.”

“The top floor? They didn’t escape? I was certain that they would escape by mixing in with the fleeing crowd.”

“It’s completely the opposite. Master and her apprentice encamped with their luggage in the rooftop of the clock tower, which, though not wide, was the highest place in the whole country. They blew off the cable of the lone elevator leading there, and let it fall all the way to the basement.”

“Ka-bam!”

“It was almost dawn. They took aim at the people who evacuated outside, as well as at the exhausted policemen who were just coming back after the commotion has finally settled down, and—”

“Bang?”

“Yes. From the top of the tower, they fired at every single person outside using their sniper rifles. They shot the tires of the cars so that they wouldn’t move, and picked off the people who fled the cars one after the other. From such a high position, they had a perfect view of the people running across the wide-open square. There was no way out,” Kino said indifferently.

“Scary!” Hermes exclaimed. “So they killed every single one of them?” Hermes asked, but Kino only shook her head as she drove.

“Wrong. That’s what amazing about Master. She did not kill a single one.”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“It was deliberate. She intentionally avoided their heads or chests, and aimed at their legs. Thick blood vessels run through the thighs, so she did not target them , either. She only aimed at the non-fatal spots on the knees or shins, and accurately hit them with her rifle.”

“Ah, so that they can shoot down the ones that would come to the aid of the wounded moaning for help, right? Just like any good sniper.”

“That’s wrong too.”

“Oh?”

“The two of them shot neither the people crawling to escape nor the ones who were helping.”

“Why? How come?”

“I also asked her the same question. Master gave me some time to think about it, but I only learned the answer when she continued her story.”

“Then I give up. Continue the story, Kino.”

“Okay. It is connected to the reason why they climbed the clock tower instead of escaping. Master knew full well that they couldn’t possibly break through the gates with just the two of them.”

“Well, that’s because there would be a lot of people positioned there to securely protect it and make sure that no one will escape.”

“That’s why they decided to wait until the citizens begged them, ‘We will open the gates, so *please* pass through.’”

“Ah, I see. It was a siege, wasn’t it? I finally get it!” Hermes exclaimed in glee, and Kino gave a small nod.

“Yes. They barricaded themselves at the top of the clock tower, and sniped anyone who comes near. This way, the building can no longer be used, and the everyday work of the people was interrupted to a great extent. The police tried to get in one way or the other. But —”

“They were being shot.”

“Yep. To them, being shot in the leg is worse than getting killed. If instead, they see their comrades getting shot cruelly to death, it will fire up their desire for vengeance, and their fighting spirit will rise. But when they see their companions getting shot, screaming in pain , they start to have such thoughts as ‘What if I’m the next one?’, and hesitate. Humans whose jobs revolve around fighting are far more terrified of being in pain than being killed on the spot. In any case, their morale is down.”

“That makes sense.”

“Even so, the police tried to do their best in front of everyone. They used armored trucks and tried to break into the building on both sides.”

“But to no avail.”

“Master thought so too, and it seemed that her student , who was framed and jailed, got fired up. He could snipe through the eye of a needle and still wouldn’t miss. All the troops that broke through were sent to the hospital, and it took lots of ambulances to accommodate the wounded. Once everything settled by noon, they dropped a letter in a sealed envelope. Of course, they used police equipment.”

“What was written in it? Something like, ‘If you don’t want any more casualties, let us leave right away!’?”

“Nope. They didn’t write something so blatantly threatening. It was more like this:

Dear Sirs,

The wind hints of the approaching summer, but we are glad to see that everyone in the police force is becoming more spirited by the hour. Well, we two scoundrels decided to turn this place into a graveyard, and so until our bows break or until we run out of arrows, we will defend this place to the last of our strength, and we intend to rampage to our heart’s content. For the two of us are unskilled, we request that you grant us your guidance and encouragement.

Yours Truly

P.S. We set up loads of bombs on the stairs up the clock tower, so if you don’t want to lose this historic building, kindly refrain from using the stairs.

When Kino finished speaking, only the sound of Hermes’ well-maintained engine could be heard in the forest.

Eventually, Hermes whispered, “Scary.”

“Yup, scary. —At that time, they had no idea what was going on in the heads of the policemen, but at that moment, they must be considering that it would be better to let the two escape.”

“Scary.”

“Yup, scary. —And of course, the commotion has already made it into the news, and the situation was made public. It was even broadcasted live on radio.”

“That is so stupid.”

“Yes. Master thought so too. The two of them were also listening to the radio, so they were saved because they learned every move of the police. At any rate, the day soon turned to night, and the police tried several times to approach stealthily. However, Master’s student had a night-vision device attached to his rifle, and so they were beaten at their own game. The two of them slept in shifts, and remained in their positions even while eating and drinking.”

“Well, how long did they keep it up?” Hermes asked.

“Three days and three nights,” Kino answered, and explained. “The situation was—

[Ehem, you two over there, can you hear me?! You bastards can’t escape! As you wish, that place will be your grave! If by any chance you don’t die there, you will be hanged after being paraded in the city! You’d better prepare yourselves!]

Zing.

[You guys are completely surrounded! So surrender like real men! If you surrender obediently, we’ll spare your lives!]

Ping.

[Is there anything you want to say? Can’t you see we’re being generous by even trying to hear your side?!]

Zping.

[Sirs, our side is willing to negotiate. It’s not a bad deal, you know.]

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat.

[Uh, how are you doing? We would like to ask for a cease-fire to be able to talk, and agree on terms for our mutual survival. What do you think?]

Brat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat.

[Good morning. There is something we would like to tell you. If you wish to leave the country, we will gladly allow it.]

Bang-bang-bang-bang-bang.

[We are begging your excellencies. Please pacify your anger, and leave our country.] [3]

Bam. Bang. Boom.

[We beg you. From the bottom of our hearts, please stop this. Please—]

Zping-rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-brat-tat-tat-tat-ba-ba-ba-bang-pew-
.

[Save me! Please stop already!]

“Now that you mention it, it would be better for us to leave the country quietly than to die here.”

[R-really?]

“Well, how much are you willing to pay?”

[…]

“How much are you willing to pay?”

[… Um, will the amount I write down here do?]

Zing.

[We’ll give more!]

—Well, something like that.”

“Demons.”

“At any rate, rather than prolonging the situation and letting the number of casualties increase, they realized that there will be less damage if they just ‘deport’ them. Master and her student ripped off the government’s money, took the police commissioner who brought it to them hostage, and made him drive the escape car up to the gates.”

“And they all lived happily ever after. The end. Wow, what a great story. —Ah, I see it.”

Just ahead of the forest where Kino and Hermes was riding in, the top of the walls became visible.

“Just in time. So, in that country, we will keep it a secret how I obtained ‘Canon’. We will go ‘shopping’ in the flea market. And of course, never ever talk about Master’s story.”

“Roger.”

“However, since we’re in this country, I want to know what remained of that story.”

“It must have been a historical event, right?”

“Unless, what Master told me was nothing but a nonsensical, exaggerated lie.”

“All of a sudden, I don’t want to believe it—”

“Yeah…”

“But we’re talking about Master here. She’s capable of anything.”

“Yeah…”

Kino suddenly looked back. She gazed at the road they just came through. There was nothing but the leaves dancing on top of the road.

“It’s all right. There’s nobody,” said Hermes.

“So look ahead as you run.”

—

Kino entered the country around noon.

Kino and Hermes stood in front of the lawn-enclosed, octagonal building with a clock tower in its center. They stopped at the end of a road that extends straight towards it. There were people enjoying a picnic on the lawn under the clear autumn sky. A few policemen could be seen among them.

“It’s a good thing the historical building remained.”

“Yeah,” Kino agreed to Hermes’ words.

“It’s octagonal, without a doubt.”

“And there’s the clock tower too.”

Kino launched Hermes and ran on the road surrounding the building.

“Kino, go a little slower.”

“Hmm?”

In response to Hermes, Kino loosened the right-hand accelerator. Hermes told her that there’s a monument beside the building’s entrance, and Kino turned in that direction.

Kino stopped Hermes in front of the monument and cut the engine. The monument was not large, and was placed obscurely on top of the grass.

Only small characters were carved on the stone. Kino set down Hermes’ stand and crouched in front of the monument.

“Kino you’re blocking the view. What’s written on it?” asked Hermes.

“The characters are small and hard to read… It doesn’t seem to be a commemoration stone for the building’s foundation, though…” Just as Kino muttered this,

“Actually, that is—”

“Whoa—!”

A loud voice sprung from behind them, surprising Hermes. Kino stood up and turned around.

It was a bald old man with a cane. He looked considerably old, and with him was a four or five year old girl who seemed to be his granddaughter or great-granddaughter.

“Ah, sorry if I surprised you. That is a monument built to commemorate the two heroes who saved our country, ” said the old man.

Hermes asked, “Two heroes?”

Kino took off her hat and bowed to the old man and the girl. “I’m a traveler, but I have interest in the history of countries. Can you please tell me the story?”

The old man smiled. “Why, of course. When I was still young, political corruption has grown widespread in this country,” he began.

“Ooh. And then, and then?”

“Even the police were involved in the misdeeds, and everywhere you go, there’s this bad atmosphere. At that time, two travelers with a strong sense of justice came to our country. They spoke up on behalf of the citizens, saying ‘This should not be done!’ or ‘This is wrong!’” The old man recounted passionately.

“After that, after that?” Hermes chimed in happily.

“After that, the two travelers, backed by the power of the masses, came and petitioned in this building—in this government building.”

“Amazing!”

“Justice and courage overflowed from the two. In fact, their speech lasted for four days. Their zeal touched our politicians and police officials, who were deeply embarrassed of their actions until then and promised not to do bad things in the future. Thanks to that, this country is now rich and happy. And they lived happily ever after. The end.”

When the old man finished speaking, the girl whose hands he was holding jumped in delight, “Grandpa’s stories always end with ‘happily ever after’!”

“There, there. You’ll make this old man fall over with your jumping,” the old man chided her with a smile.

“I see, so this monument was for that historic event,” Kino remarked.

“That’s right. Even now, the story about the ‘two travelers of justice’ is written in our history textbooks. When this child grows up, she’ll also learn it at school.”

Kino thanked the old man, and then asked, “This is another story, but…what happened to your legs? In this country, there are so many old people, particularly men, who are carrying canes with them.”

For about five seconds, the old man’s face twitched and froze. The girl looked up at him wonderingly.

“Uh, w-well! —People my age were born with bad legs , you see. The c-cane-manufacturers made a k-killing out of it, too,” the old man stammered, his expression still stiff. And as he laughed, he gripped his cane firmly, dragged one foot and walked away together with the girl .

When the two have vanished from sight, “What now, Hermes? Want me to read the monument just in case?”

“Nope,” Hermes answered immediately. Kino put on her hat, straddled Hermes, and started the engine.

Kino rode Hermes slowly, the building behind them. They began to converse as soon as they were out of earshot.

“That was something. Kino, which one do you think is true?”

“You can tell, can’t you, Hermes.”

“Yeah. But it’s an optimistic country, in a way. And being optimistic is a good thing.”

“In a sense, maybe.” Kino agreed with Hermes, laughing lightly. And then,

“But, what will you do if Master makes a comeback?” Hermes asked casually.

Kino suddenly looked back. She gazed at the road they just came through. There was the form of the big building with the clock tower.

“It’s all right. There’s nobody,” said Hermes.

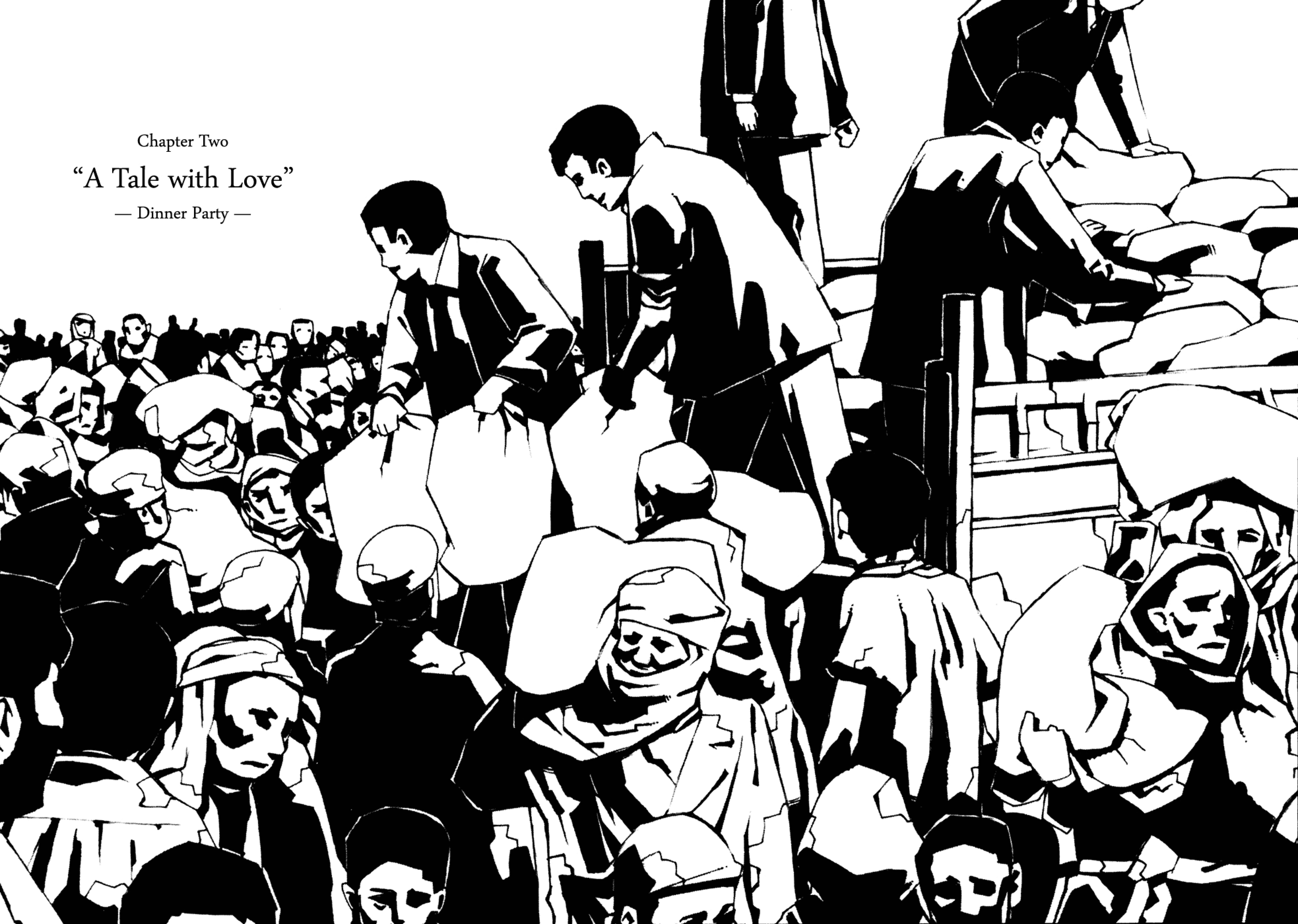
“So look ahead as you run.”

“A Tale with Love” — Dinner Party —

Chapter Two

"A Tale with Love"

— Dinner Party —



There was a lone road in a mountainous region where winter has just made its presence known.

The mountains’ gentle slopes were lined up with slender trees that lost their leaves during autumn. As a result, there was very little color anywhere; everything had a monochromatic shade of light brown.

The dazzling morning sun brought out the bold contrast between the clear, blue sky and the forest. Even so, the occasional strong gust of wind was cold and dry.

The road ran level with the slopes, looking as if it was sewn on the mountains. It was dismal and bare due to the dry atmosphere, and was not even littered with fallen leaves. It was only wide enough to let one car pass through.

And on this road ran a motorrad (Note: A two-wheeled vehicle. Only to note that it cannot fly).

Its rear wheel had boxes on both sides and was topped with traveling luggage. It raised a thin cloud of dust as it proceeded on the road roughly to the west.

The rider was wearing a long brown coat, the excess hem of which was rolled up to her thighs. She wore a brimmed hat with flaps covering both ears, and goggles with a silver frame that was already peeling off in places.

Before each curve, the rider would loosen the accelerator, incline the motorrad while keeping her gaze forward, and gradually accelerate once again as the road straightened out. As soon as they passed through the first mountain, the next mountain came in sight.

While running, the rider of the motorrad opened her mouth, and let out a lifeless voice.

“Ah…”

“What’s the matter, Kino?” the motorrad asked. The rider whose name was Kino replied with a sigh,

“I’m hungry.”

“Then stop and rest! If you collapse from hunger—” The motorrad nagged.

“Fine, fine. Riding a motorrad is a sport, and so on. It’s just like running, etc. And so the moment… I’ve heard that countless times already, Hermes,” Kino continued.

“If you know, then you should do it,” the motorrad called Hermes answered incredulously.

“Well, it was bad enough that the previous country was in ruins,” Kino said as she went past a curve, and then continued, “If only it were not, I would have been able to relax and eat something delicious as planned.”

“My sympathies, Kino. I thought that country we visited was just recently abandoned; but it seemed like it was the work of a terrible storm. There was not a speck of food, only the rolling white bones of corpses.”

“You sure are lucky, Hermes. We were able to scrape up plenty of fuel from junk cars… Thanks to that, I had to put up with the stench of that old fuel.”

“Good job.”

“Well, thanks. Moreover, there’s very little crop in this forest… I was wondering if there were animals that could be eaten around here, so I’ve been keeping close watch for some time, too.”

“You’re free to shoot if anything shows up. But there are no squirrels, let alone deer.”

Sigh

Kino and Hermes both fell silent and continued to ride impassively.

It was a little before noon. After they finished ascending the slope that appeared before them, and when they have crossed over its gentle ridge, an enormous basin came into view.

And in that basin, there were people.

“What could that be, Kino?”

“Who knows…?”

Kino and Hermes slowly descended the hill road. As they approached the basin, the mountain changed into a dry land completely devoid of trees and grass.

There were hoards of people just ahead the road. People have gathered by the hundreds, and the center of the basin looked as if it would be completely filled with humans. Tent-like structures could be seen amidst the crowd.

“They don’t seem too happy.”

“I wonder if they are refugees…”

“It looks that way,” Hermes agreed.

The assembly of people buried the center of the basin, turning it into a black carpet. There were so many people that the ground was barely visible. The road that continued to its center looked like a thin, brown line amidst the black mass. Beyond the cluster, there was a big hole on the ground.

Kino and Hermes descended further down the hill and approached.

The people were in a terrible condition.

Despite the cold weather, everyone wore tattered clothing. The people were abnormally thin without exception—their cheeks hollow, their limbs like sticks. Only their big, blank eyes could be discerned from their dirty faces. There were people sitting or lying down on the ground, people on their sides who were barely moving except for their breathing. People were tightly packed inside the tents built here and about.

Kino parked Hermes before this mass.

“What a shock. How many people do you think are there?”

“Beats me… But there’s a tent that looks different from the rest over there on the left slope.”

On the south side, people could be seen from a tent that was slightly separated from the rest.

“From the looks of it, those are army troops. They’re wearing uniforms, and some of them even have persuaders (Note: A gun),” Hermes observed, and then asked, “What are we going to do in the meantime?”

“It would be great if there is someone we could talk to, someone who could explain to us what’s going on,” Kino said, and Hermes agreed.

Kino unfastened the front of her coat, and launched Hermes without removing it. Its hem slowly trailed in the wind as they rode closer to the ragged crowd.

Most of the people who turned their blank gazes towards Kino stood up. They were typically adult men carrying what appeared to be sticks in their hands.

They walked on the road, blocking it off. Then they glared at the slowly approaching motorrad.

Upon seeing what waited ahead, Hermes spoke, “I think they’re going to attack. I’m *sure* you look tasty to them, Kino.”

“That would be troublesome,” Kino replied casually.

“Can you fire two or three shots?”

“I told you, didn’t I? Very hungry—I am.”

“Oh, to emphasize you even used perverse word order.”

A few seconds of silence passed after Hermes’ remark. During that interval, they had gotten much closer to the dark mass of men barring their way.

Eventually, Kino asked Hermes, “… Um, ‘*reverse* word order’?”

“Yeah, that,” Hermes said, but he didn’t stop,

“Your reaction was so late. You must be really starving.”

—

“Excuse me, will you please let me pass?” Kino said. She stopped before the cluster of men who glared at her as they obstructed the way, but she did not alight nor turned off Hermes’ engine.

“…”

The men did not say anything. They only turned their gaunt, ghoul-like faces towards Kino.

“Everyone, if you don’t move, you’ll get run over by this brash rider over here,” Hermes said.

“How mean,” Kino complained.

Eventually, a man spoke up in a lifeless voice.

“… Anything will do.”

“What?”

“Anything will do… Share us some food… Whatever little you have… Everyone’s hungry.”

“Me too,” was Kino’s immediate reply.

And then she reached out for her right thigh. The hand that came out from underneath the coat gripped a single hand persuader. It was a high-caliber revolver that she called by the name ‘Canon’.

Upon seeing this, the men heaved a sigh and kept silent.

Soon after, a shrill gunfire echoed.

The shot came from within the crowd. The men turned around and walked with frail steps to the side of the road . A four-wheel drive came running on the road towards Kino, driving away the people by the sides. Aboard it were four soldiers wearing green uniforms. They fired their persuaders several times towards the sky as warning.

The four-wheel drive stopped in front of Kino who had already holstered Canon. The person riding in its passenger seat told her to follow along until they reach the end of the road. Kino consented and answered with a gesture, and headed in the same direction as the other vehicle.

The four-wheel drive advanced on the road sandwiched by the refugees, with Kino and Hermes following from behind. A soldier on-board the vehicle held his persuader in a stance devoid of openings. The form of the two vehicles was reflected in hundreds of blank eyes.

* * *

Halfway through the cluster of people, there was a road that branched off to the south. The four-wheel drive turned to this path, and Kino followed. Once again, they drove amidst the refugees, and finally reached a road gently climbing up the slope. They went past the mass of refugees and headed towards the tent at the end of the road. In front of this tent was a fence made of thick logs.

The gate that was built on the road was protected by several soldiers armed with persuaders. When the four-wheel drive approached, a bar with red and white stripes lifted to let them pass. It was lowered as soon as Kino finished passing through.

It was an army's camp. Green tents were lined up evenly, with soldiers standing on watch, or sitting and taking a rest. Cars and trucks were parked all about, and right beside each was a drum of fuel.

Kino stopped Hermes and took off her hat and goggles . Among the soldiers who observed, the man from the passenger seat got off and approached. Kino lightly bowed her head.

“Well, that was dangerous. If you had handed them just one candy, they would have flocked around you until you’re dead.”

“My thoughts, exactly.”

“Since our forces are here to protect our comrades and our equipment, we wouldn’t have been able to help you even if you got attacked, miss traveler.”

“Is that so? But you were a big help. Thank you very much.” Kino expressed her gratitude.

“Ah. It was purely ‘by chance’ that our regular patrol caught sight of you. —You are pretty lucky, miss traveler ,” the man said nonchalantly, then guided Kino and Hermes to a tent. The tent, which was supported only by a pole and roof, was built slightly apart from the others.

Over there were a number of officials wearing decorated uniforms, high in both rank and age, surrounding a table.

“We have brought along this traveler who happened to pass by, and whom we found ‘by chance’.”

“I see. Good job, Sergeant. You can go now.”

After the sergeant saluted and left, Kino introduced herself and Hermes.

One man introduced himself as the general. It was a man who, probably because of his imposing moustache tightly stretched on both sides, effected an air of self-importance. Afterwards, he informed Kino that they were the army of a neighboring country.

“What’s going on?” Hermes asked tersely. From their location, they could see very well beyond the fences the bottom of the basin down the slope, and the refugees in it .

“Oh, you mean them? Well, let me answer your question,” the general said while fixing his beard with his fingertips. And then he turned in the direction of the refugees. “There are many small countries in this area, but those people are originally from a country a bit to the east from here.”

“We saw it yesterday. Indeed, there was not a single person there. It was quite a sight.”

“Then I’ll make the story short. —For several years, no crops grew in this area because the summers were too cold. A record-breaking crop failure continued. And because of the negligence of the leader of that country, the problem of food provisioning was not resolved, until finally the country collapsed. Those who had strength escaped, but most of the people who couldn’t do anything became hungry refugees and wandered towards this basin.”

“Uh-huh. Do the surrounding countries have any plans to help?”

“Hmph. We would like to help if possible. But our country and our neighbors have our hands full with the same crop failure, and we don’t have spare provisions to help to that extent.”

“I see.”

“Without much choice, our country and neighbors have decided not to let them leave this basin so that they will not advance any further. And so we sent out our armies and kept watch in shifts.”

“What will become of them?” Kino asked.

The general answered, “There’s nothing we can do for them. As we speak, a number of them die from hunger or illness. If several tens of people die each day, eventually no one will be left come spring. The only thing left for us to do is to drop the corpses in that large hole and fill it up with quicklime.”

“I see,” Kino said. A weak, cold wind blew, ruffling Kino’s coat and blowing down the basin.

“By the way, miss traveler.”

The general trained his gaze on Kino with a somewhat sinister look.

“Yes?”

“It’s almost noon. —Care to join us for lunch?”

—

“It’s very delicious. I’m impressed.”

Kino, in her black jacket and wearing a napkin around her neck, was sitting at a table under the roofed tent among the officials. A magnificent meal was lined up before them on the table.

The main course was a fat and juicy roasted ham steak in raspberry sauce and boiled sausages with pickled cabbages. There was a side dish of carrots and broccoli salad, which was warm but was not steaming due to the cold weather. It was served along with fresh mayonnaise. Furthermore, they were served a rye bread called *kommissbrot*[4] and a bottle of salt-free butter. There were fruits like apples, pears, and grapes. There was also hot tea in a pot and honey to go along with it.

Kino immediately replied with an ‘of course’ to the lunch invitation of the general. And just as the general told her, she did not hesitate at all, and ate the food with gleaming eyes. Hermes who was parked behind her remained silent.

“… It’s a good thing that you liked it,” the dumbfounded general replied with a forced laugh.

From the table where Kino and the rest were seated, the refugees at the bottom of the slope, who were suffering from hunger and despair, were in plain view. The fragrance was carried by the wind and reached them .

At this table, Kino continued eating heartily, but only enough so as not to appear ill-bred.

“General, among the food I have eaten until now, this black bread is the best.”

“That’s good to hear. Later, I’ll convey that compliment to our bread-baking unit.”

“Please do.”

As Kino cut up a large portion of the ham steak and carried it to her mouth, the general asked, “By the way, miss traveler, is ‘cold-heartedness’ the most important emotion you should carry when traveling?”

Kino answered as she finished chewing the ham.

“No.”

“Oh, then what is it?”

“That is, love for yourself. I was taught that loving yourself more than others, in any circumstance, is the most important thing of all. —This ham is also very delicious.”

* * *

“We’ll be taking our leave. Miss traveler, please take your time.”

“Thank you very much, General.”

The bearded general and the other officials left the table as they finished eating. Most of the plates had leftover food.

Only Kino and one other person were left at the table.

It was a rather fat man whose body and face were both plump. His uniform looked quite tight on him.

He was slowly but surely cleaning up his own plate.

“… Hmm? Oh.”

He noticed Kino’s gaze, and then a light, awkward smile appeared on his face before he spoke.

“I’m doing my best so that nothing will be left.”

Kino, who had cleaned up her own plate nicely, looked at him while wiping her mouth with a napkin. He carried the last broccoli to his mouth with a fork and finished chewing.

“I know it looks like I’m just gorging myself—” He began to talk to Kino who was seated opposite him, slowly drinking her tea. “But you see, when I see those people dying from starvation right before my eyes but can do nothing to help them, I feel like it’s my duty to at least finish all the food before me.”

“I see.” Kino was not especially moved, but replied without a hint of criticism.

“Because of that, I have become so fat since I came here. —What’s the secret so that I can stay slim like you, miss traveler?”

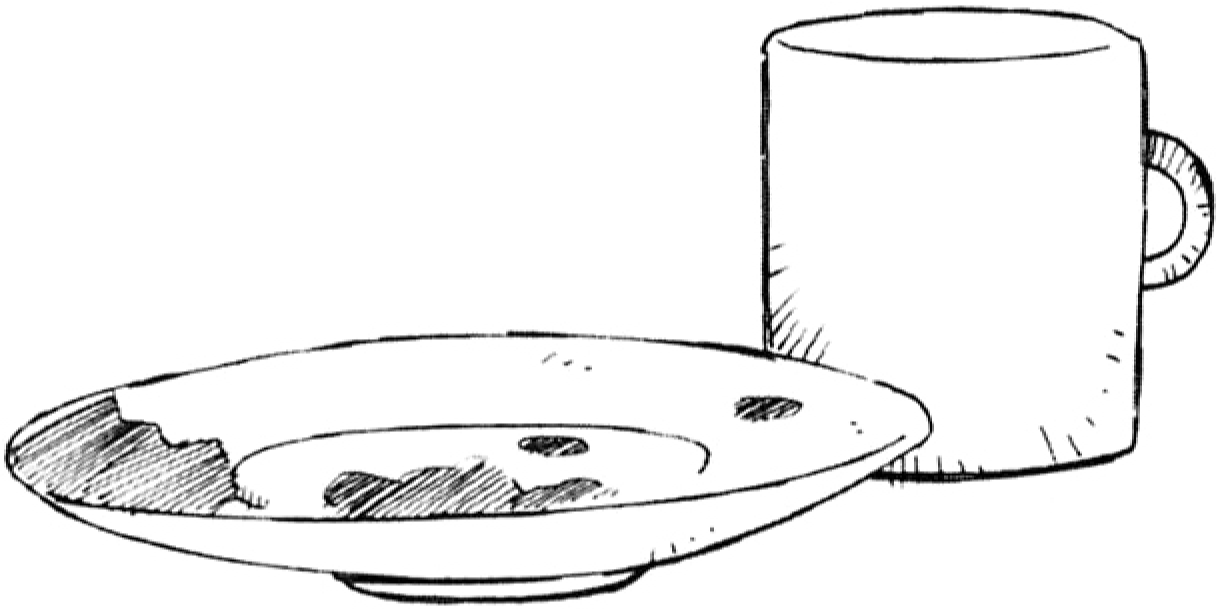
Kino considered the question for a while, and then,

“I suppose you won’t get fat if you ride a motorrad the entire day.”

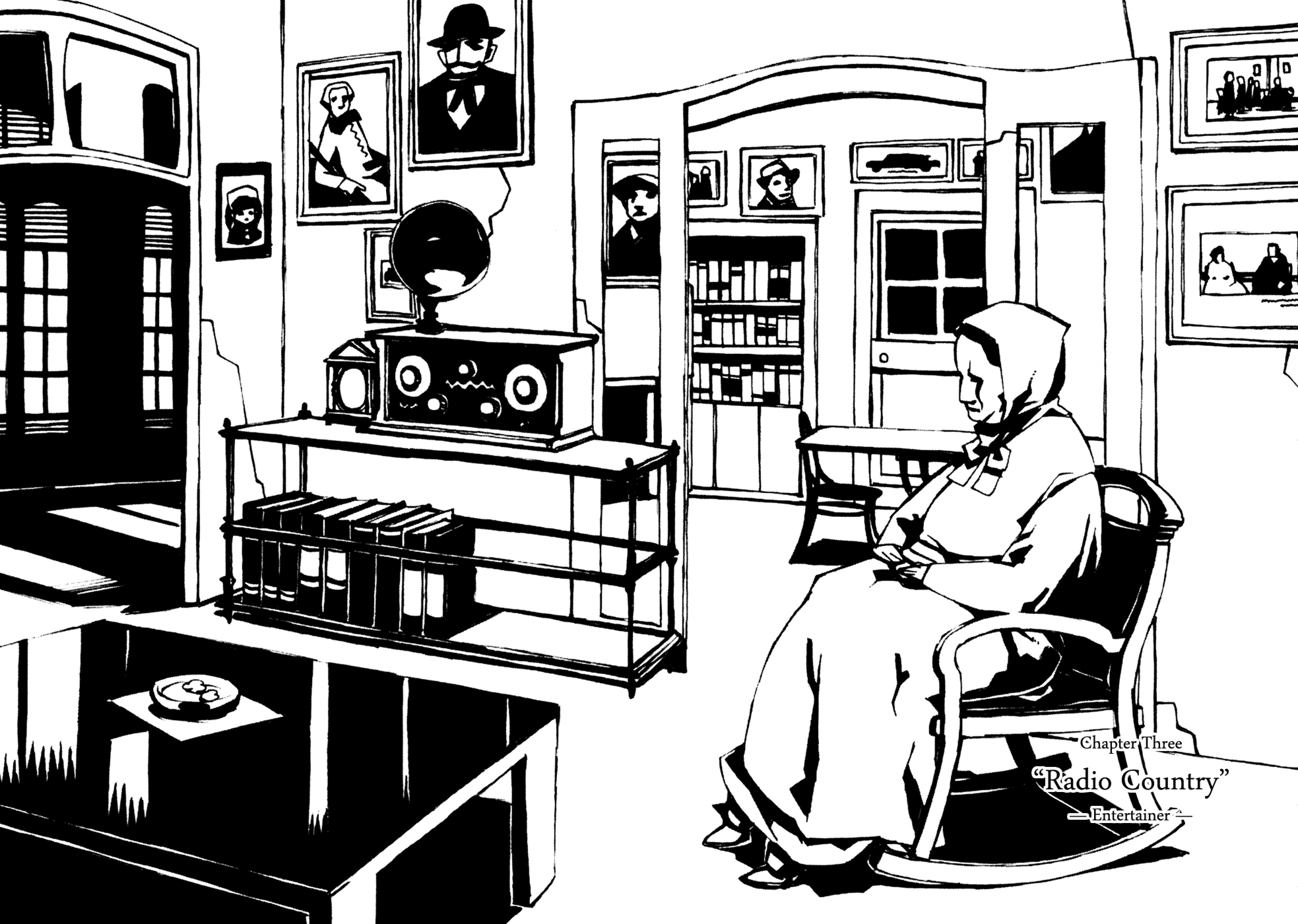
—

After they finished their tea, they offered thanks for the meal and stood from the table.

One of them returned to his duties, while the other returned to her travels.



“Radio Country” — Entertainer —



Chapter Three

“Radio Country”

— Entertainer —

[Good evening to everyone listening to our government radio station. Thank you for waiting. It is time for this station’s most popular radio program, brought to you twice a week—“Mr. Scherzi’s Start Now!” Tonight as well, we will be enlightened with various issues that would go unnoticed without Mr. Scherzi’s sharp insight. Our previous week’s broadcast, “Futility of Electricity, Futility of the Mind”, received plenty of reaction through phone calls and letters. Thank you very much. —Now Mr. Scherzi, please be our guide once again.]

[Good evening and thank you.]

[Let’s cut to the chase. Our topic for this evening is ‘ traveler’, isn’t it?]

[Yes, ‘traveler’. For tonight, I want to develop my discussion from this.]

[Why is that again?]

[Of course. —Well, I’m sure everyone knows about the traveler who entered our country four days ago, and left just yesterday evening. Some of you may have even seen this traveler in person.]

[This rare visit even made it to the news. It was a traveler called Kino, who came to our country on a motorrad. Apart from the traders flowing into our country, it has been more than five years since a ‘pure’ traveler made their way here.]

[It is likely that among you, there are those who were glad that someone came from a different land to this small, isolated country. And probably, some of you were pleased with the thought that ‘we are not alone’, and having seen that the traveler had a safe stay and left with a smile, were relieved that you didn’t make a blunder during his visit.]

[Ah, it’s just as you say. Why, it’s been such a long time, after all. I won’t go as far as naming them here, but it seems that there were even politicians present in the welcoming party held in the dining hall of a lodging house built from our taxes.]

[Anyway, speaking of carrying out our duty as hosts, I suppose we did a good job. But please hold on. Has everything really ended well? That is our theme this time .]

[You mean to say?]

[I’ll go straight to the point and say my conclusion—that traveler is a fake.]

[Eh? He’s not a genuine traveler?]

[That’s right. There were several ‘strange’ points that made me adhere to this conclusion. Before the main discussion, I’ll raise several examples of these points. First of all—the traveler’s age.]

[It was quite a young fellow. Around mid-teens, I say.]

[Exactly. His youth was thoughtlessly and recklessly published in the newspapers as surprising and impressive, but this was the first detail that made me suspicious. For someone that young to go traveling all alone—isn’t that beyond common sense? Why is it that no one noticed this fact?]

[Oh, now that you mention it…that is true…]

[Be that as it may in his home country, still, wasn’t that an age where he should still be going to school? Moreover, do you think that’s a conduct parents would normally approve?]

[Ah, but see here. Wasn’t that a case of ‘making your beloved child go on a journey’?]

[That was a proverb they used to say a lot in the past, but people has taken it out of context. Those words originated from an era where traveling is the only way for a person to undergo successive hardships. But it actually means roughly the same as ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’. Today, having your child travel in lawless regions between countries is taking it to a dangerous extreme. And from that, we can see another point come to surface.]

[Oh, and that is?]

[That is, the contrived nature of such a youth going across lands rife with danger.]

[I see… Well, he was carrying a persuader, though.]

[Indeed he was carrying one. Unless you are some man of legendary strength, there is absolutely no way you could go on a journey without having any weapon. —But if I have to say it, *that* was a mistake.]

[‘That’, meaning?]

[That hand persuader hanging from his right thigh. I only saw it in photos, but it certainly looked like a six-chambered high-caliber revolver.]

[And how was it a mistake?]

[What I am saying is that it was a persuader that would be impractical for any traveler to have. This will be slightly technical, but let me explain. It was a type of revolver that requires its bullets, gunpowder, and primer to be packaged separately. It’s a rather old kind, different from the ones in general use nowadays, which use bullet cartridges.]

[Oho. And what about this old type?]

[You see for this type, once you’ve fired off all six shots, reloading takes such a tremendous amount of time . Now that there are automatic-type persuaders that can fire twenty or thirty rounds in one load, using that sort is a bit, you know…]

[Figuratively speaking, ‘why use a quill when you can use a fountain pen’, right?]

[Yes, you nailed it. One has to choose a weapon for a journey thoroughly and realistically. Taking such an antique item to deck out oneself is mere self-gratification, a display of artlessness.]

[I see… As usual, your sharp viewpoint enlightens us.]

[But indeed, not one person from this country noticed. But still, saying, ‘It’s understandable, since not everyone is well-versed when it comes to persuaders,’ is a rather shallow excuse, I say. —It’s a good example of slacking off and overlooking a fatal mistake.]

[Indeed. So even though he had a weapon, you noticed this one ‘odd’ detail about it.]

[Yes. —But, it’s not just the persuader, that motorrad is strange as well.]

[Oh?]

[It’s too big. Both the wheels and the engine. When you are choosing a motorrad, it is typical to pick something that would be suited to your body type. And so, there’s no reason for him to choose such a bulky model.]

[I see. Now that you mention it, it really looked unnatural for that traveler.]

[There’s more.]

[More?]

[He had a rather neat appearance. It’s strange no matter how you look at it. It seems that he was clean enough to not raise any attention while walking around the city. I heard that the guards and the inspectors at the gates were pleased with that.]

[Yes, there were such reports indeed. —But according to the person himself, he cleans up whenever he has the chance.]

[It can’t be that simple. What? After camping out in a place without a shower? Don’t tell me he had been swimming in a freezing river this late in autumn? Everyone sure was easily fooled.]

[Speaking of travelers, isn’t it expected for them to have scruffy beards and be quite dirty?]

[That’s too much stereotyping, but still, he’s too tidy…]

[I see. The flaws are coming out one after the other. I’m just beginning to see the truth myself.]

[There are various perspectives. However, you should not think that you have seen everything just from a fleeting glance of what’s before your eyes. You will only be easily fooled that way. You were intentionally shown only what is right in front of you, but there are a lot of things that people don’t want you to see.]

[Indeed, we know that there are a lot of people who can easily be deceived in this country.]

[And just as I have said from the start, that person is a ‘ pseudo-traveler’—a fake. It’s just a person pretending to be an aloof traveler who wandered through the wilderness, alone with his motorrad.]

[Then, Mr. Scherzi, according to your conclusion, what is that traveler’s real identity, once and for all?]

[Ok. It’s probably a person from a neighboring country . We can’t really limit it to the closest countries, but he should be living in a country nearby. Of course, that he continues to travel by himself is a lie. A big fat lie.]

[And so—]

[He must be an extremely immature guy from a well-to-do family. He came to a place somewhere close to this country with a truck or something, taking the motorrad and some attendants with him on a pleasant journey. Of course, they must have paid a good deal for guards. Along the way, he must have had a cook to prepare wonderful meals for him to eat, and clean clothes to change into every day.]

[And then, he disguised himself before he entered the country.]

[Yes. He dressed up ‘like’ a traveler, piled up some luggage on the motorrad, and in order to convincingly play the role of an achiever, added the persuader. If a veteran traveler were to enter the country, this rustic country’s people would be very glad. I am sure he must have thought that he would be able to savor the pleasant feeling of being pampered and being looked at with admiring eyes. There’s no doubt that deep inside, he’s snickering at the gullibility of our countrymen.]

[That gives him quite a bad character.]

[We were all taken for a ride. Upon leaving the country, he must have been united with his friends. About this time, they’re on the way home to their country, laughing their hearts out. It was a mere three-day journey, after all.]

[That may be true. But he did say that he had decided on this as a rule for his journey.]

[I think that the truth is he would have liked to stay as long as he can. But in order to not let his disguise wear off, he lied and made up a traveler-ish ‘personal rule’ as an escape.]

[I see. There is some truth to that way of thinking.]

[Though in all respects, he was only a cowardly con artist, right about now, he may be announcing to his chums how he was able to completely deceive a whole country. —But now that the truth has been revealed, broadcasted and has become well-known facts, from here on, no matter what he thinks or what he says to anyone, it will only be a proof of his foolishness, nothing but piling shame upon shame.]

[In a way, he’s blessed for not knowing it.]

[Well, this may look only like a youth’s pranks exposed in broad daylight. However…seeing that his identity went unchallenged and that he was pampered due to our countrymen’s naiveté only shows that there is some problem with our people’s critical ability and prudence. The main message that I want to impart this time is this: The spreading disease of ‘lack of critical thinking’ and ‘simple-mindedness’ in this country.]

[‘Lack of critical thinking’ and ‘simple-mindedness’, is it?]

[Yes. Those two comprise tonight’s theme. Adults of ‘ good sense’ from our country believed this traveler without a second thought. If he were not a mere ill-natured trickster, but was actually a spy sent by an enemy country, what would have happened?]

[That’s not a very appealing thought… They would probably think that this country is very submissive.]

[That might be seen as a reason for having a national defense, but it is not necessarily impossible. With that, I want our concerned citizens to seriously reflect about this .]

[Indeed.]

[There are too many gaps in this country. That is, there are too many gaps in its people. I want everyone to know that indifference and innocence are things that at times, can be considered as crimes.]

[The innocence of children is still pleasant, though…]

[About that. Though everybody thinks children are innocent, there are many of them who have composure and are capable of rational judgment. In fact, when my nephew heard the news about a traveler entering the country, it seems that he asked his parents many times over, ‘Really? Did a traveler really came?’ In other words, the child was able to see through his camouflage. This is quite amazing. A proof that a mere four-year-old child was able to get closer to the truth than the great majority of our citizens.]

[The accuracy and keenness of a child’s observation is really shocking at times.]

[Definitely. And when they grow up, that will be reversed, and what will emerge is the carelessness of an adult. It would be great if everyone turns back into children all at once.]

[That’s a bold proposal, but if that were to happen at once, this country might fall into ruin.]

[Well, it’s ruined enough as it is. This country is already in the process of decay. —Just as I said before, if all the adults here were to die at once, then that will give birth to a country of nothing but children. But once those children become adults, the world at that time will be much more preferable than the one we have right now. I assure you. —But of course, something like that is not possible, so we’ll just have to do with the tragedy of a country we have right now.]

[These blunders, or deeply ingrained ‘mistakes’ of adults—where did they come from?

[That is of course, a problem of the ‘mind’. I have been saying it from the beginning, but, right now, the adults don’t understand at all what that true ‘mind’ really is. And they don’t try to understand it. They don’t notice that they’re losing something important. They continue to pretend that they don’t notice. And the tragedy goes on. That is the true present condition of this country.]

[I see. It only means that adults no longer have a mind for ‘self-criticism’. —It’s about time, but let’s give way for tonight’s conclusion.]

[‘Lack of critical thinking and simple-mindedness’— If we continue living our lives like this, then we are headed to a mental downfall of this country. I’ve said it many times before, but that day is just right at the corner. People who haven’t realized it yet may be laughing lightheartedly, but for the sake of this country, please realize that that day of despair is about to come.]

[Thank you very much. —Everyone, what do you feel about this? We’ll be awaiting your phone calls or letters for your opinions and requests. See you again next time. Next will be the weather corner.]

—

[Hello. Is it all right to call now?]

[It’s okay.]

[Did you listen to the broadcast just now?]

[Of course. Just as always, that guy did a good job stretching out some obscure theory.]

[It was amazing. Usually, I erase the recording, but I saved it this time. When he talked about ‘minds’ out of the blue, I spewed out the tea I was drinking.]

[I roared out laughing when I heard about his nephew ‘who saw the truth on his own’.]

[Then there was that old ‘waiting for the day of despair’ discussion. He went talking about how he was so smart, being the only one to have noticed it, and all.]

[Yeah. —But they have been saying that non-stop since five years ago. Just when is that day gonna come?]

[They’ll keep on saying that until it comes, so someday they’ll get it right.]

[Hahaha. That corner is really fun. I want it to go on.]

[You bet. By the way, do you think the traveler was really like that?]

[Traveler? Ah, the traveler that was used as primer for discussion. —Whether it’s true or not doesn’t really matter anymore.]

“Hello there. Mr. Scherzi, thanks for today’s work.”

“Yeah.”

“Today’s show was also quite impressive. About this time, our PR must be getting flooded with phone calls. It will probably surpass the record of our previous installment.”

“That’s great but…there’s some weakness in the evidence, or a hole perhaps. But it’s just an opinion, so I guess it doesn’t matter.”

“Oh? Well let’s hear it for now.”

“That argument about the persuader. It may be true that his choice of weapon was offhand, but if it’s for traveling purposes, then it is reasonable to avoid bringing heavy weapons or those that use too much ammunition. That persuader uses gunpowder that can be bought everywhere and its bullets can be hand-made from molten lead. It is quite convenient in terms of not having to carry too much bullets with him. I believe that traveler knows this very well.”

“Your obsession is kicking in again. You really are detailed when it comes to persuaders, Mr. Scherzi.”

“There’s one more.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“There’s a hot spring about half a day’s travel to the east. That traveler must have camped out there. That was why he was clean. The water and steam there can be used as much as one likes, after all. Geologists know about this, so it would be a better not to mention it too much.”

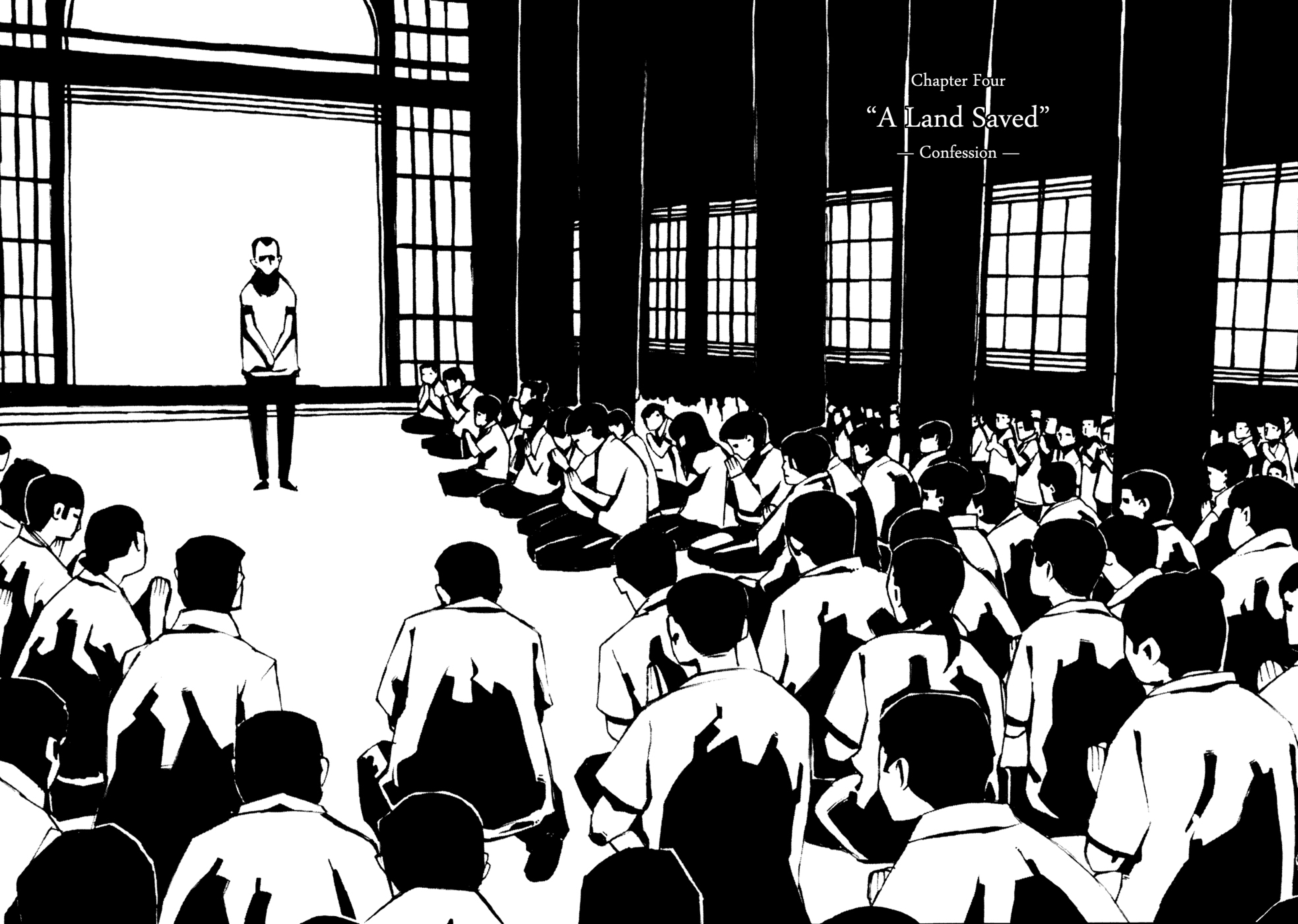
“Okay… For the time being, I’ll mention it to our script writer. But you know, almost nobody who listens to us will understand that.”

“That may be true, though.”

“Well, help us again next time, Mr. Scherzi! Thanks for the good work!”

“Sure. Thank you.”

“A Land Saved” — Confession —



Chapter Four

“A Land Saved”

— Confession —

There was once a traveler named Kino. Despite her young age, she was very skillful with persuaders (Note: A gun), and almost no one could surpass her.

Kino’s companion in her travels is a motorrad (Note: A two-wheeled vehicle. Only to note that it cannot fly) called Hermes. Hermes’ rear back seat was converted into a carrier and loaded with lots of luggage on top. Because Kino is a traveler, she goes around visiting various countries.

Once, Kino and Hermes arrived in a certain country.

Inside a forest thickly grown with trees that will make your neck hurt if you try to look up at their tops, there was a green wall covered profusely with ivy—it was as if it was deliberately being hidden from view. The season neared the end of spring. It was neither warm nor cold, and a pleasant breeze was blowing.

“It’s just as the rumors say, Kino.”

“Yeah, if we weren’t told about this country, we would never have found it.”

—

At the gates, Kino asked for approval to stay for three days. And as she was a rare visitor, she was warmly welcomed and was soon given a permit by the sentry. The gates opened with a clatter.

What was seen upon passing through the gates was the last of the forest, with the scenery suddenly transforming into an open and level land. There was a meandering expanse of fields and pastures, and groups of domestic animals grazing leisurely on the grass. It was a little country with a population comparatively smaller than its vast land, and doesn’t seem to have seen much advancement in science. Since it was almost evening, small streams of smoke could be seen rising out from the chimneys of log cabins here and there.

“It seems like a good country,” Hermes said. Kino agreed, and then decided to look for an inn.

Kino asked around when they arrived at the center of the country, which had many buildings. But there was nothing like an inn in this country to which almost no traveler ever comes. Out of kindness, they were allowed to borrow one room in the large wooden building that seemed to be the town hall, as it was the gathering place of the residents. Kino was able to sleep under sheets after a long time.

—

The next morning.

“Jeez, so noisy—”

Hermes, who normally wouldn’t wake up even if you kick him hard, was roused with a loud noise coming from the streets.

The noise that drifted into the streets from a megaphone tied to a telephone pole was a voice accompanied with a peculiar melody. The voice had an odd accent, with words repeating over and over again like an incantation. It was completely incomprehensible. Even the background music was so bizarre, it would make one wonder what the composer looked like.

Kino, who woke up at dawn as usual, was already finished practicing with her persuader and physical exercises, taking a shower, and eating her breakfast, which was portable rations due to the lack of a cafeteria in this country.

“What a wonderful country. —I didn’t have to smack you awake, Hermes.”

“This isn’t a joke. What in the world is happening here ? Ah, there it goes again.”

“I’d like to know myself. We’ve been to many countries before and have seen a lot of things, but it’s the first time there’s something like this. So, let’s go check it out today.”

And so Kino and Hermes left the building to go sightseeing.

And immediately, they were surrounded by people.

—

Upon being surrounded by the residents, the first thing that surprised them was the strange bamboo garments that they wore. Everyone was dressed in clothes that Kino had never seen in any country before. But it was unfathomable as to what kind of purpose the person who made it had in mind.

Then they all spoke, asking Kino one after the other whether they performed their religious ceremony well… or not.

“Religious ceremony?”

Kino cocked her head as she did not understand the question’s meaning, so the people explained.

What they were performing was a religious ceremony. First, they wanted to ask whether the traveler was a ‘ believer’, as this religion was supposedly widely accepted in many countries, and has a fairly large amount of followers. If it were not the case, as she must have witnessed the ceremony in some other country, they would like her to tell them whether their own version of the ceremony was good. Wouldn’t it be too embarrassing to show it to adherents from other countries? Would it make them closer to God? They asked unanimously.

“Kino?” Hermes asked.

“Um—” Kino began. The people paid attention. “It’s a pity, but I came from a small country and I didn’t know about this ceremony. Moreover, I merely drop by in the countries I visit, so I don’t have enough time to get acquainted with their culture. I’m really sorry to let everyone down.”

What he was about to say was completely different, so Hermes remained silent.

The strangely-clad residents of the country were fairly disappointed by these words, but they soon pulled themselves together, and said that since it can’t be helped , Kino can just get to know the religion in this country.

And so Kino spent the time until lunch hearing from various people about their wonderful religion, its incomprehensible doctrine, and the ceremony, which could only be described by the word ‘weird’. Hermes was asleep the whole time.

Kino had to put up with this ordeal, but her mood lightened up when she was invited to a big house to eat lunch along with the other people.

During their after meal tea, one middle-aged woman talked to Kino.

“It’s such a relaxing and heart-warming religion, so it was proclaimed official quickly.”

“Huh? Since when was it propagated in this country?” Hermes asked.

The answer they gave was unexpected. It appeared that this religion was only spread in this country about ten years ago, and only a lone missionary who happened to arrive in the country did the work. However, it spread throughout the country in no time at all. If he had so wanted, this missionary could have obtained a luxurious life or immense political power. But he was not greedy, and even now, he chose to live in a small house at the edge of the countryside, and lives a quiet life while meeting with his believers from time to time.

“If it were not for that man, I believe this country would have become worthless. No, it may be that this country would have been gone by now,” said one man.

“What do you mean?” Kino asked.

The man explained as a representative of the crowd. Ten years ago, this country fell into a so-called ‘dark age’. No crop was harvested, animals could not reproduce, bad weather continued on end, a strange ailment befell the people, children did not listen to their elders, so on and so forth.

“That’s exaggerated,” Hermes blurted out without thinking, but the people were dead serious.

Weariness and despair spread among the people, and just when everybody was on the verge of giving up, he came—a missionary disguised as a worn-out traveler.

‘If you can, please do as I say. —You will gain peace in your soul.’

He began to preach with these words. Originally, they had a native religion, but no one had any idea when it started. However, when it did not help them in their hardships, the citizens readily abandoned it and embraced the new faith. They prayed desperately, conducted ceremonies, and implored with all their might .

“And then a miracle occurred.”

From then on, the harvest became fruitful, the livestock multiplied, the illness faded away, the weather calmed down, the children listened to their elders. The country was showered with blessings, and each person regained their health, both in mind and body.

“I see,” Kino said as she was taking a bite out of her tea cake.

“T-t-t-t-t-t-there’s trouble!” A lone man leapt into the room with a pallid face.

“I don’t know what happened, but you don’t have to be that flustered. God is watching us, you know.”

The man was admonished by the others to collect himself. However,

“But! The missionary w-w-w-wanted to m-m-meet with the t-t-t-traveler, just the two of them!”

“What!” “What did you just say?!” “No way!” “Are you kidding?!”

Everyone went in a panic.

—

“It is extremely rare for him to see anyone else other than a representative. This is such an honor, so don’t you dare be disrespectful!”

Being told such, Kino and Hermes headed towards the house of the missionary.

They rode around the country, following behind a man’s tractor. The people who were doing farm work waved their hands as they passed through the fields and crossed the pastures.

“You just have to go straight through here. I’ll be on my way. —I beg you; please do not show him any discourtesy.”

Having parted with the guide, Kino and Hermes also went beyond the outskirts of the country, and entered the path towards a reforested area.

Upon doing so, they soon found a small log cabin that stood silently among the trees. As they were informed, it was the missionary’s house.

As Kino stopped Hermes’ engine, a lone man went out of the house.

Dressed in ordinary shirt and pants, it was a middle-aged man with a passive expression. Both his face and body were slim; his face was cleanly shaved and he had no beard.

“… I’m glad you came. I welcome you along with your motorrad.”

The man spoke gently to Kino and gestured for her to come. They entered the log cabin, and then she set Hermes beside the table on his center stand.

The man invited Kino to sit down, and sat opposite her . He joined his hands in front of his face. And then, he gave Kino a straight, intense glare.

The first thing the man said was, “Did you tell?”

Neither Kino nor Hermes understood what he meant.

“If you did, I will have all of the citizens go after you, and you will not be able to get out of this country alive,” he then said.

This time Kino somehow understood his meaning, and asked, “About what?”

“About that religion I taught them,” the man said, and Hermes understood.

“I knew it. You’re a fraud.” For a moment, the man trembled, surprised with Hermes’ blunt words. Hermes was unfazed, and continued, “What you mean to say is, we are not supposed to tell what we have seen or heard.”

“I haven’t said anything yet. —But, I don’t think they would believe what I would say,” Kino said.

“But, if you say anything I will kill you. I will never let you out of this country alive. You can count on it.”

“I’m not going to tell. Hermes too!”

“My tongue *might* slip.”

“Then I will have to leave you behind—”

“I was lying. I’m not saying anything. I don’t have any reason to do so.”

The man took one long breath, and grunted, “I see… Then, it’s all right.”

There was silence for a while.

“Is that all you have to say to us? If so, then we will go back to our sightseeing,” Kino said.

The man said yes, and nodded, and Kino stood up from her chair. But soon the man seemed to have changed his mind, and stopped them. He put his joined hands on his forehead.

“It’s all…a ridiculous sham… It was just something I said in the spur of the moment; just some random speech I came up with… Ah…”

“…”

The man began his monologue, his head still hung down. Kino silently looked down on him. Just behind her , the motorrad named Hermes asked a question.

“Mister, if you were not a ‘missionary’, then were you originally a traveler?”

“That’s right… I was a traveler, a wanderer… Ten years ago, I arrived in this place, where no one would have thought a country existed.”

“What was your reason for lying? Did you intend to deceive them?”

“No… At the beginning I was all alone, and I really needed help. Then on the roadside, I saw a girl all worn-out. I told her,

‘If you say this, you’ll feel better. It’s a prayer from my country.’

“Without giving it a thought, I taught her a charm… something my grandmother used to say to me to cheer me up when I was just a child. I thought it would be nice if that child feels better from it…”

The man’s spiel continued. The girl, just as the man had hoped, felt much better upon reciting the words with a strange ring in them; words she had never heard before . Though it was a mere psychological effect, the family of the child made a big deal out of it, and spread rumors. Soon, the poor who were exhausted of their lives began pouring into the same room where Kino and Hermes stayed in the night before, to visit the man.

“If only I stopped that time…if only I told them it was all a lie…”

Furthermore, the man thought of a fitting incantation, as well as a religious ceremony modeled after some callisthenic exercises he had learned back in his childhood.

“That family taught it to their neighbors, and soon it became popular in their whole village.”

The fad in this village spread bit by bit to the whole country, and soon, more and more people came to visit the man, seeking to learn about this ceremony.

“I couldn’t tell them the truth…”

The man boldly declared to the people who relied on him:

‘I will teach everyone about this religion ‘×××××’, which has saved a great number of people in my own, and in many other countries!’

With all his might, the man spread to everyone in the country the teachings he came up with, the ceremonies he fabricated one night he couldn’t sleep, the religious melody he composed out of thin air, and the festival outfit he happened to see in a country he visited one time .

“… How naïve! How foolish these beings are!”

The man snarled, his hands still fixed on his forehead.

“I see, it was a very interesting story—” Hermes began , “But, what *exactly* do you intend to accomplish by telling us all this? Do you want Kino to get you out of this country? Do you need help in escaping?”

The man lifted his face to this question. Kino, who had been silent all along, became slightly surprised when she saw the man’s face.

“How preposterous!”

So said the man, his face smiling, and his eyes beginning to get blurry with tears. It was a wonderful smile.

“I don’t want to leave this country! To leave here you say?!” the man declared as he parted his firmly joined hands and curled them tightly into fists.

“Oh? —But why?”

“That’s because—” the man answered with a smile, but was only able to say this much before his words trailed off. He placed his fists on the table.

Before Kino and Hermes who looked on in surprise, tears began to flow down from the man’s eyes like waterfalls. The tears streaked down his cheeks and fell to his knees.

“That is…that is… I-It was because…I was saved by this country…” The man said brokenly as he cried.

“I…did not wish to go on a journey… I just couldn’t bear to stay in my home country… It’s just that…I was born to a family of low social standing… I was abused and scorned my whole life… I couldn’t stand it anymore —”

The man raised his fists from the table. He lifted his gaze and spread his arms apart. It was as if he was trying to seize the sky.

“Then, I stumbled upon this country. A country that needed me! A country I was meant to save!”

Neither Kino nor Hermes said anything, and only looked at the man who gazed up at the sky with tears gushing forth from his eyes.

“This is a wonderful country! I was saved by this country!”

Soon Kino left the log cabin, pushing Hermes along. The man couldn’t see their backs behind his tears, which fell from his eyes like waterfalls.

“Indeed…I don’t believe in God or the like… But! But if there really is a God…please let me stay in this country like this. The land that I saved…please do not take it away from me. I just want everything to stay as they are … Oh, God—”

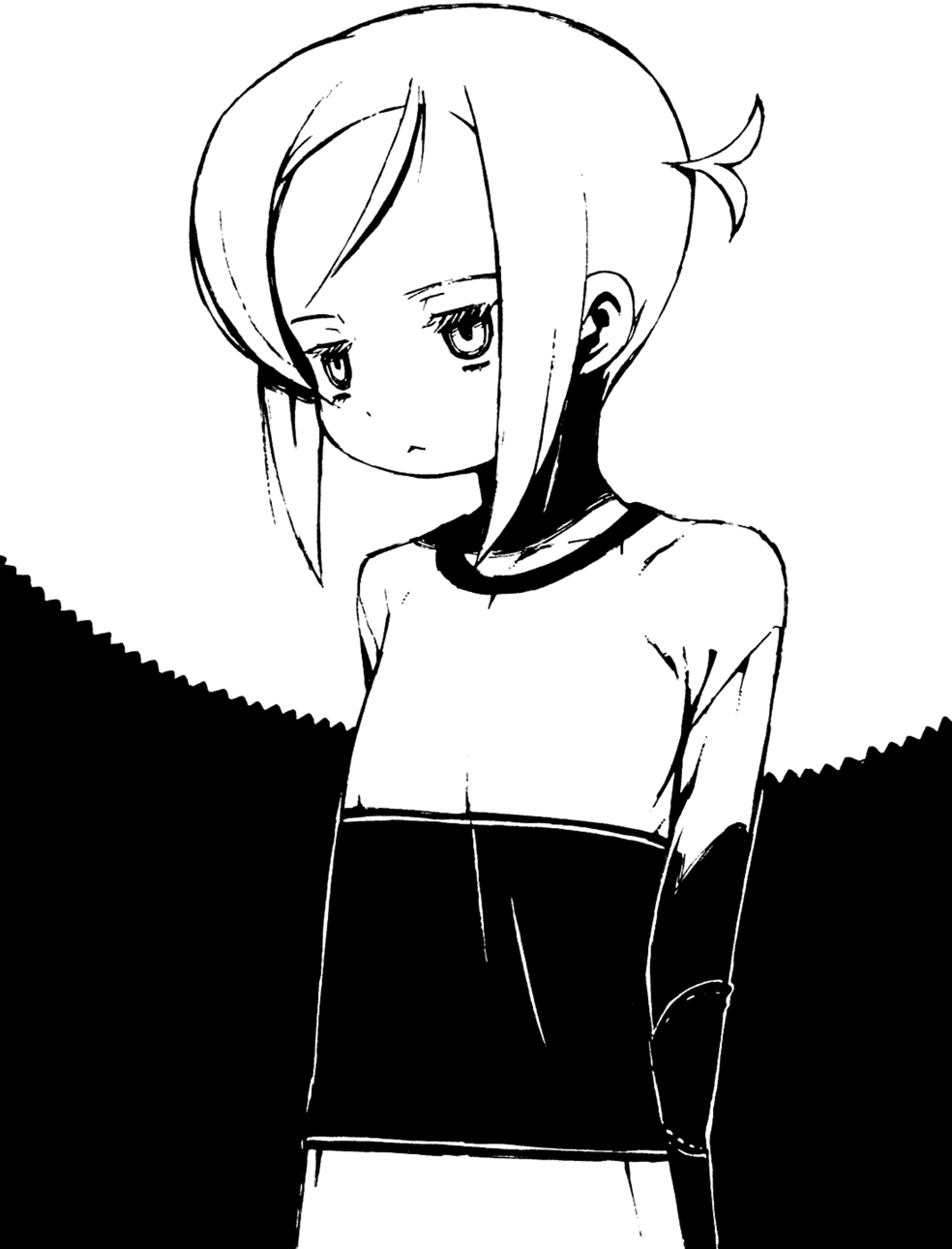
“The Ship Country” —On the Beach · a—

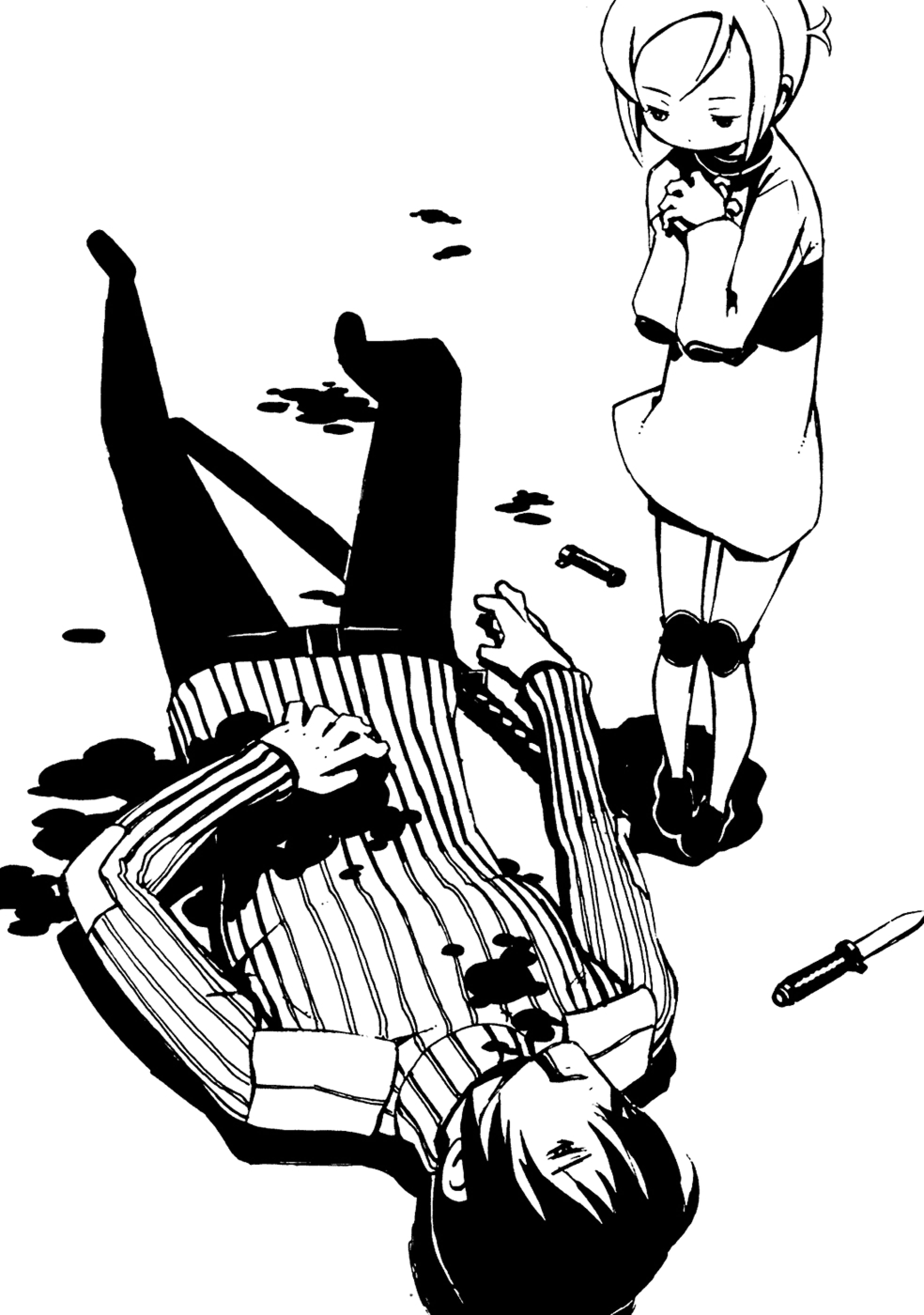
Translated by Untuned-Strings [here]

Epilogue

“The Ship Country”

— On the Beach · a —





Afterword

☆時雨沢恵一著作リスト

「と見せかけて the Beautiful Word」（後書き）
「実はこれです the Beautiful Word」（同）
「たまには変な the Beautiful Word」（岡）
「場所を使って the Beautiful Word」（門）
「後書きを進め the Beautiful Word」（冊）
「て行きたいと the Beautiful Word」（聞）
「思っています the Beautiful Word」（回）
「ソレデハ」（問）
「シバシノⅡ　お付き合いを」（周）
「ヨロシクⅢ（上）　お願い申しあげます」（願）
「トウトウⅢ（下）　今作も八巻まで来ましたよ」（嬉）

Translation:

This looks like a list of my works at first glance, but the truth is I just felt like putting the afterword at an unusual place this time. Anyway, thank you for our partnership. This book has reached its eight volume at last.

Thank you very much for supporting and anticipating this book.

◆

Acknowledgement

My heartfelt gratitude to the following people: my brilliant illustrator
and MediaWorks Dengeki Bunko's editorial staff,
Mr. Kouhaku Kuroboshi
Mr. "Editor-in-charge"

◆

電撃文庫

キノの旅Ⅷ

the Beautiful World

also borrowed the help of the following people

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Books with missing or disordered pages are quite rare. Was it luck?
The price did not go up so much.
Unauthorized referencing (referring) to all or part of this book, without exceptions, will please Sigsawa.
If you wish to refer to this text, no form of correspondence is needed. Let your imagination explode (Note: Plagiarism is bad.)

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Printed in Japan
ICBM÷8402×2059=?

Being a Dengeki Bunko Author

It has been five years since I made my debut as a novelist with “Kino no Tabi”. ‘Five years’ doesn’t sound much, but if you were a sixth grader when you bought the first volume back in July 1999, you must now be a senior high school student worrying about your university entrance exams. It seemed like a blink of an eye, but it was a long, fun, and somewhat tough journey.

During that time, “Kino no Tabi”, which was born from the manuscript submitted for a newcomer award, has reached its eight volume, and the plans for another series, “Allison”, has been accomplished without incident. My sincerest gratitude to all of you, readers.

Just an aside, this is the first volume I finished writing after I have changed residence. The bed, tea table and small chair I used to write on has become a desk and a Recaro seat (a car seat). I think the difference in the viewing level does not manifest itself at all in the subtlety of my writing style. Believe me.

And from now on, whether I am seated, doing a one-legged stand, handstand, or yoga pose—— no matter what the circumstance or weather, I will be able to write interesting stories that can delight everyone! Quickly! Energetically! One after another! In rapid succession! If only I could…, yeah.

(Editor’s Note: You wish. And the last word is tiny.)

2004 October 10
Keiichi Sigsawa

雷撃文庫

ANISON Waruichi Shigueki Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro	ICBM÷8402×2060=?	We are the "Anison Singing Troupe". Anison whenever, wherever! Let's go to the karaoke and sing 'til morning! — — This is the birth of the stunning Anisong Novels by Waruichi Shigueki!	G0193	し-ぐ-さ
ANISON II Noon and Night Song Waruichi Shigueki Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro	ICBM÷8402×2061=?	Karaoke houses cease operations. The beloved places disappearing one after the other! What will you do now, "Anison Singing Troupe"?! — This shocking development is merely an omen! Here comes the controversial sequel!	G0193	し-ぐ-さ
ANISON III (A) Defend the Mic to the Last Waruichi Shigueki Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro	ICBM÷8402×2062=?	The "Anison Singing Troupe" begins the journey to seek for the legendary mic. But a new enemy stands in their way — The persistent continuation of this tale! Alas, the lyrics are being blurred with tears…	G0193	し-ぐ-さ
ANISON III (B) The Stage Called Intrigue Waruichi Shigueki Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro	ICBM÷8402×2063=?	The "Anison Singing Troupe" gets dispersed. But not a drop of Anison's ardent spirit is lost! — Seeking the legendary lyrics of the third song, the journey continues!	G0193	し-ぐ-さ
KINO NO TABI the Beautiful Socks Waruichi Shigueki Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro	ICBM÷8402×2064=?	"Wear my socks, you say?!" — People getting entangled with the fate of a single rebel, and the worldwide "Anti-Socks Union" shaking history! Brace yourselves for this historical drama!	G0193	し-ぐ-さ

雷撃文庫

KINO NO GOBI
Waruichi Shigueki
Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro
the Beautiful Inflection
ICBM÷8402×2065=?

A change in inflection is a change in the heart… The painful and tremulous awakening of love; a poignant love fantasy conveyed through the beautiful Japanese language — Sending you these feelings with endless tears.

G0193
し-ぐ-さ

KINO NO OBI
Waruichi Shigueki
Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro
the Beautiful Belt
ICBM÷8402×2066=?

"That belt will save the world." The hero possessed by the legendary belt. Led to the 'Country of Belts', a shocking truth awaits! A fantasy that will rock the dry-goods industry!

G0193
し-ぐ-さ

KINO NO SABI
Waruichi Shigueki
Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro
the Beautiful Rust
ICBM÷8402×2067=?

A gasping life within deep-red rust. A scientist discovering a devil's research. The fate of the rust attacking mankind and the girl who battles it! Bringing you a sci-fi action set in the near future!

G0193
し-ぐ-さ

KINO NO DABI
Waruichi Shigueki
Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro
the Beautiful Cremation
ICBM÷8402×2068=?

"Fire!" — Enter! The extreme moe novel seriously dealing with cremation! Excitement and strife born from the crematory! The life and death of a being! The shocking controversial work that will make waves in the publishing world!

G0193
し-ぐ-さ

KINO NO EBI
Waruichi Shigueki
Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro
the Beautiful Lobster
ICBM÷8402×2069=?

One day, Kino decided she wanted to eat a shrimp! So she went to the beach! And dove in! And caught shrimp! And cooked it! Presenting an ambitious work about opposing social factions on fishing rights!

G0193
し-ぐ-さ

雷撃文庫

KINO NO HOBI the Beautiful Hobby

Waruichi Shigueki
Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro
ICBM÷8402×2070=?

Hobbies are what people live for. Hobbies are the lubricants to human life. A girl whose hobby is seeking hobbies, a human drama of finding one's self. An explosion of Shigueki's interests!

G0193 し-ぐ-さ

KINO NO FUBI the Beautiful Defect

Waruichi Shigueki
Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro
ICBM÷8402×2071=?

A tiny defect was discovered in what was believed to be a flawless system in the spaceship. A crisis drawing near the life-preservation system. What will be the fate of the girl who faces this predicament? Get ready for this confined-space action.

G0193 し-ぐ-さ

KINO NO HIBI the Beautiful Days

Waruichi Shigueki
Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro
ICBM÷8402×2072=?

Invigorating days, peaceful days. The girl will always be right there — The traversing paths of the forest-dwelling girl and a visiting traveler. Raise the curtains to a heartfelt fantasy.

G0193 し-ぐ-さ

DENGEKI PRIZE MURDER CASE

Waruichi Shigueki
Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro
ICBM÷8402×2073=?

A string of murders across Japan. Unrelated victims at first glance, but they all passed the secondary selection for the Dengeki Prize! Brace yourselves for this shocking mystery hacking its way through the editorial department!

G0193 し-ぐ-さ

THE AFTERWORD

Waruichi Shigueki
Illustrated by: Hakuboshi Koukuro
ICBM÷8402×2074=?

A story with a 2-page main text and over 200-page afterword. A mentally-troubled author pouring his thoughts in a controversial novel. (Note: This work is expected to run out of print early)

G0193 し-ぐ-さ

Note: You have just read this volume's afterword — Keiichi Sigsawa

Translator's Notes

1. ↑ One of the stories in the second Kino no Tabi PS2 Visual Novel.
2. ↑ Also included in the second PS2 Visual Novel.
3. ↑ It is not so obvious once translated, but in Japanese, this dialogue is quite comical due to the change in the tone of the police officer from extremely rude to extremely polite. This is particularly observed with the pronouns used for ‘ you’: *kisama* --> *omae* --> *kimi* --> *anata* --> *anata-sama* (arranged from rude to polite).
4. ↑ *Kommissbrot* is a type of bread supplied to the German military during wartime. Literally, it’s ‘ army bread’.